

DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLE MODEL FOR
WOMEN: ACKNOWLEDGING, IDENTIFYING,
AND ADDRESSING GENDER BIASES

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ABSTRACT

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by
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The context is New Webster United Methodist Church in Wadmalaw, South Carolina.

The problem investigated is that gender discrimination exists within New Webster United Methodist Church. If leaders participate in training about gender bias, then they will be equipped to advocate for gender equality in ministry. This was a six-week project. The methodologies used were pre-and post-questionnaires, circles, sharing, and concept mapping. The data analysis findings proved that the hypothesis was proven correct for gender equality in ministry.

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I would also like to thank my professional associates, Dr. Lee Fields, Jr., Dr. Kenneth Cummings, and Dr. Femrono Wood whose expertise, direction, and honesty helped to structure and keep this project grounded.

I want to thank my ROOTED Cohort for giving me this golden opportunity to work on this project and standing with me and by me through this journey and reminding me to trust the process. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my Johns Island Parish Church family who have been actively involved in this project, stood in the gap for me to have the time to attend class, and just have been so very supportive of me, their pastor, on this journey.

I am grateful to my parents who did not get to see me complete this journey but who instilled in me the love of Christ and always reminded me that, “It will be alright.” A heavenly “thank you” Dad and Mom, (Ralph R. Way, Sr. and Georgia M. Way), for your unwavering support and belief in my abilities.

I would also like to acknowledge the assistance provided by the United Theological Seminary's school administration and staff. Their cooperation and provision of resources have greatly contributed to the successful execution of this process. I would also like to thank my sister (Rev. Kathy Shider) and my bother-in-law (V. Wayne Shider, Sr.) for their love, support, and inspiration shared to me and my family throughout this journey.

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Lastly, I want my loving and supporting husband to know that I am forever grateful and thankful that God was so kind to give me to him. Micheal Gordon, I Love You and I Thank You for always standing with me and beside me, for your loving support, and for making this process a fulfilling and enriching experience together. We did it! We did it! We did it!

DEDICATION

I dedicate my dissertation work to my loving husband and friend, Mr. Micheal “JoJo” Gordon, who attended EVERY Intensive, who is my number one encourager, and who continues to show me unconditional love.

I dedicate this work to The Johns Island Parish of The United Methodist Church, (Bethlehem St James and New Webster), for every word of encouragement and every act of love shown to me and my family, for the trust and support of participation in this project, and for being disciples of Christ. To The JIP Lay Leaders, Sis. Cheryl Glover and Sis. Alice Ravenel and all The JIP Lay Servant Ministry, thank you for the work poured into our JIP Family during this doctoral journey and the support you gave me throughout the process.

And I dedicate this work and give special thanks to my sister and best friend, Kathy E. Shider, for being there for me throughout the entire doctorate program. I love you, Big Sis.

ABBREVIATIONS

CEO	Corporate Executive Officer
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
GBHEM	General Board of Higher Education and Ministry
ITC	Interdenominational Theological Center
NIV	New International Version
SCT	Social Conflict Theory
UMC	United Methodist Church
UWF	United Women of Faith

To all the girls who have faced injustice and been silenced. Together we will be heard.

—Malala Yousafzai, *I Am Malala: The Girl Who Stood up for Education and Was Shot
by the Taliban*

INTRODUCTION

This project is an incredibly important initiative to challenge gender discrimination and empower women in leadership, especially within the church. The issue of patriarchal systems silencing women is deeply rooted, and raising awareness through structured workshops can be a powerful way to spark change. Patriarchal systems and practices continue to silence women and prohibit them from fully accepting their call to hold positions in leadership in and out of the church. In Wadmalaw, South Carolina, women desiring to hold positions in leadership in and out of the church are often ignored, rejected, discriminated against, or shunned. This project is the catalyst for a six-week workshop model designed to raise awareness of the importance to speak out about gender discrimination on every level. This thesis and project seek to bring awareness to systems and practices that hinder women from accepting and/or striving in leadership positions while providing tools to navigate such practices and bring about changes in mindsets.

Chapter one, Synergy, centers on my personal experiences as an African American woman, pastor, mom, and wife. I have cried more tears than I could ever explain. In as much as on my pastoral journey, I have walked through rejection, misunderstanding, and systemic barriers. I am ashamed to say that far too many women in ministry can relate to the challenges of women in leadership in the church. The problems that I faced and continue to face are common for women who want to fulfill

their God-given right to lead. On Wadmalaw Island, there are seven African American churches all over 141 years old and in all those years only two women have pastored in those churches. Five churches have never had a woman as the pastor, despite the fact that women are the foundation of the churches. A cursory examination of in person visits, Facebook videos, conversations, and photos from worship services within this target area indicate that women are the majority attendees. Yet, men are often the leaders, who uphold patriarchal views, systems, and practices that are designed to keep women in subservient roles. Women are prohibited from any churchwide senior leadership positions, including pastor.

Yet, I continue to lean on the Lord so that strength and determination shine through proving that leadership is not defined by gender but by calling, perseverance, and faith. My journeying has led me to Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina, at New Webster United Methodist Church, where I have found that reflections on flawed traditions and faulty theology are powerful. I have walked with many women through communities that struggle with deeply ingrained beliefs that limit women's leadership in and out of the church. That is why this project and our voices are catalysts for change.

Chapter two, Biblical Foundations, emphasizes the idea that while Old Testament teachings, both in customs and laws, gave men an advantage over women, Jesus acknowledged in Matthew 19:8 that the law of Moses did not prescribe an ideal society but rather concessions from an imperfect one with rules tailored to a different culture and covenant. Judges 4:4-16 shows women's capability in today's struggles. The story of Deborah in the Bible illustrates how the Lord calls ordinary people to extraordinary deeds through the Spirit, and God does not select any person on gender specifically. Raising our

voices together to raise awareness about gender bias will pave the way for dispelling the cultural and generational barriers that hinder women's growth and development from within. God chose Deborah as a civil leader, prophetess, and judge over men, and we increasingly see women aspiring to be Deborah leaders today.

Chapter three, Historical Foundations, is a celebration of fearless women who have shaped history. From Sarah Crosby's groundbreaking step in 1761 to Leontine T. Kelly becoming the first African American woman bishop, each of these figures shattered barriers and made space for future generations. Their courage, resilience, and vision transformed the world, not just in the church, but across industries and institutions. It is inspiring to think about the ripple effect of their leadership. Trailblazers such as Sojourner Truth and Harriet Tubman fought for justice with unyielding determination while others like Mary McLeod Bethune forged paths in education and civil rights. And of course, the torch continues to be carried by women in every sphere of life ensuring that progress never stops.

Chapter four, Theological Foundations, embodies my passion for Methodism and the need to bring awareness to gender bias. This chapter centers around the teachings of John Wesley and emphasizes on social holiness to create a powerful framework for faith rooted in love, community, and action. Understanding Social Holiness is deeply inspiring because that mustard seed size faith expands in ever-widening circles reaching from small groups out into the world. The Methodist commitment to mission and social justice has led to meaningful change throughout history, and I carry that legacy forward with conviction today as I advocate for the oppressed, the broken hearted, and the

marginalized daily because the Methodist movement teaches that we pursue our faith in community and action with others. There is no Holiness that is not Social!

Chapter five, Interdisciplinary Foundations, explores sociology and its intersection with religious institutions. Karl Marx's Social Conflict Theory provides a sharp lens for examining structural inequalities, particularly in leadership and gender roles. If power dynamics are at play rather than purely theological convictions, Marx's Conflict Theory suggests that resistance to women's leadership stems from a desire to maintain control rather than doctrinal interpretation. Throughout history, we have witnessed how marginalized groups – whether women, racial minorities, or the economically oppressed – push back against systems that seek to limit their agency. The church, much like secular institutions, is not immune to these struggles.

Chapter six, Project Analysis, was inspiring. It captured the transformative power of intentional reflection and collective action. The Sister 2 Sister Connection Workshop was a profound space for Black women (persons) in leadership to embrace their roles, challenge ingrained limitations, and ignite change within their communities. The use of Concept Mapping and journaling as tools for shifting mindsets proved to be an impressive tool for learning as it revealed how structured reflection can dismantle barriers and foster growth. The simple fact that the discussions and centering moments sparked a fire for change speaks volumes. Leadership is not just about holding a title; leadership is about cultivating spaces where voices are empowered, perspectives shift, and systemic barriers begin to crumble.

CHAPTER ONE

MINISTRY FOCUS

My life has always been one of survival and endurance. On my journey I have learned many lessons — some the hard way. I have made mistakes, but God has extended grace and has allowed me to grow through mistakes and hardships. When I began my leadership journey, I thought I was a tough girl. I thought I could do anything and conquer the world; no obstacle seemed too hard to overcome. I had passion and faith, so God and I could do anything.

The Women in Faith auxiliary at New Webster United Methodist Church and the numerous Women’s Circles in churches that I have pastored continue to focus on the development of policies that combats societal ills that would diminish and dehumanize women and girls. I believe that as these women circle leaders at New Webster seek to help others in all walks of life, they have missed the mark with seeing and hearing their own personal and spiritual growth needs. When we “learn to be,” meaning we check in on one another and listen to each other, we build strong, powerful, spirit filled Women of Faith.¹ I can attest to the fact that in many ways females in general and women of color throughout the world, including Wadmalaw Island, are treated as second-class citizens with rules that dictate how or if we should lead. The spoken and unspoken cultural and

¹ Juanita Campbell Rasmus, *Learning To Be: Finding Your Center After The Bottom Falls Out* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 21.

generational ideologies at New Webster suggest that females should stay in their place and be thankful to do women duties or chair positions better suited for women such as hospitality chair, usher president, communion stewards, or something similar. These cultural norms that were laid out generations ago have always worked — whatever worked looked like to them. Those antiquated mindsets limit the gifts and opportunities for women to succeed in leadership positions in ministerial and secular jobs. Women are discouraged to feel called to pastoring, an administrative chair position, or church lay leader position. They are made to feel and believe they are inferior and incapable to hold certain leadership positions because those positions are God ordained positions to be held by males. Women and men alike are culturally taught that God did not call women to preach or lead in the church nor to lead jobs such as fire or police chief. They are taught to believe that such jobs are to be held by men because women are not strong enough to handle such duties or to lead men.

On Wadmalaw Island, there are thirteen religious organizations. These churches have served the community for more than one-hundred and forty years; however, even with a strong female foundation, women have been overlooked, underappreciated, and misrepresented. The thirteen churches on Wadmalaw Island have only appointed three female leaders/pastors over the course of more than one hundred forty-one years.

Down through the years, I have always been empowered by the way Aretha Franklin spelled “RESPECT,”² because spelling the word out ensured the message was loud and clear. Being a tough girl amazed me that Aretha Franklin had to call for

² Aretha Franklin’s song “Respect,” has been an anthem for many people, especially women. On the album cover the word is highlighted in Caps: RESPECT.

“RESPECT” towards women because everyone desires RESPECT! Aretha wrote an autobiography in 1999, entitled, *Aretha: From these Roots*. In her autobiography Aretha called the song RESPECT, “an ongoing blessing” in her life.³ Her autobiography empowered many women then as it does for so many women today. It documents Aretha’s life as a single teenage mother, working to balance a home life with a career, coping with two failed marriages, and relationships that were filled with joy and littered with unforeseen heartache. Yes, many African America women have been and continues to be inspired by Aretha’s willingness to be transparent.⁴ The song became a running anthem for the feminist and civil rights movements throughout the 1970s as it continues to be a clarion call for change still today.

Much like Aretha, Beyonce – a music artist and entrepreneur – felt the need to share her hurt that women from all walks of life – rich, poor, black, white, everyday Mary Jane and super star artist – continue to deal with RESPECT issues. Thus, on April 23, 2016, Beyoncé Giselle Knowles-Carter released her sixth solo project “Lemonade” through a world premiere on HBO.⁵ I am genuinely please to learn that so many women and girls have been able to navigate through pain and heartache, sorrow, and shame to find healing and joy, hope and wholeness. Queen Bee’s visual album chronicled the experiences of many African American women in intimate and social relationships. Many women and girls saw themselves or witnessed family or friends abused, scorned, or

³ Tina Benitz-Eves, “The Meaning Behind Aretha Franklin’s ‘Respect,’” American Songwriter, <https://americansongwriter.com/The-Meaning-Behind-Aretha-Franklins-Respect>.

⁴ Tina Benitz-Eves, “The Meaning Behind Aretha Franklin’s ‘Respect,’” American Songwriter, <https://americansongwriter.com/The-Meaning-Behind-Aretha-Franklins-Respect>.

⁵ Courtney Lewis, “Finding inspiration in Beyonce’s ‘Lemonade,’” Music Director of the Jacksonville Symphony, August 4, 2019, Jacksonville, FL: Jaxsymphony.org.

disrespected. They mourned the treatment that women endured at the hands of men who professed to love them and the communities that were supposed to protect them. Beyonce's music spoke to the joys and pains of womanhood in such a way that left sisters open to share their own wounds while yearning for healing and transformation. The wakeup call/movement that was birthed after "Lemonade" aired encouraged sisters to seek resources that would help them unpack the rich Black feminist and womanist themes that filled the visual album. To accomplish this, the "Lemonade Syllabus" hashtag was created.⁶ I too began to seek new and powerful ways to see my own identity and find strength through the things that caused me to feel less than or broken. I began to speak up for myself and other women who lead. I became empowered through the sharing of my own story, and I began surrounding myself with people who encouraged me to run on and see what the end would be. What followed is the essence of Black Girl Magic. Black women, from all walks of life used social media to suggest books, films, songs, and poetry, primarily by Black women, that they believe best accompanied "Lemonade" and spoke to the essence of Black womanhood in its historical and contemporary manifestations. Hundreds of resources were shared that specifically spoke to Black women and girls from classics to fiction to Black feminist theory to inspirational and self-care guides.⁷

It is my belief that the pre- and post-questionnaires along with a six-week data collection, meditation moments, and journaling will heal and transform women to tell

⁶ Courtney Lewis, "Finding inspiration in Beyonce's 'Lemonade,'" Music Director of the Jacksonville Symphony, August 4, 2019, Jacksonville, FL: Jaxsymphony.org.

⁷ Courtney Lewis, "Finding inspiration in Beyonce's 'Lemonade,'" Music Director of the Jacksonville Symphony, August 4, 2019, Jacksonville, FL: Jaxsymphony.org.

their stories of domestic violence, depressive thoughts, and unsafe ideations as they strive to set themselves free through open discussion coupled with Bible study and journaling. These forward steps will be the needed bridge towards wholeness with an open door for clinical services if needed to let go of unhealthy thoughts, to disconnect from venomous persons, and to aspire to be an inspiration to others to “be well.”⁸ In other words, United Women in Faith will create a sisterhood that will span for generations of Black girls that “rock” as they lift their stories, moving beyond their pain, taking the lemons at their feet, and making lemonade.

Context

At age fifty-seven, I better understand empathy and I realize the need for RESPECT. With seventeen years of pastoring at five appointments, I realized the importance of what it truly means to be a witness for the Lord in the good times and in the bad. Being a witness is not all about preaching and teaching, loving, and walking upright. Being a witness also entails listening, partnering, suffering, and sharing. Being a witness will cause you to be broken and torn, weary and worn. But in the midst of being broken and weary in spirit and feeling torn and worn in self-love, there is joy in knowing that God has the capacity and willingness to put you back together-better and stronger than ever before.

As an African American woman, pastor, mom, and wife, I have cried more tears than I could ever explain. However, through those tears I have gained more strength and

⁸ Juanita Campbell Rasmus, *Learning To Be: Finding Your Center After The Bottom Falls Out* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020), 21.

endurance to keep putting one foot in front of the other despite the roadblocks, stumbling blocks, backbiting, misunderstanding, and just plain meanness that has spilled into my lane of life. Pastoring is my second career and without a doubt the best job I have ever had and by far the hardest job I have ever held. Yet, I will take nothing for the journey because God continues to bless me through the family members I encounter daily.

I never expected that by accepting my call to preach the gospel of Jesus, the Christ, I would be ostracized by my peers and my congregations. I discovered that patriarchy and other females would vehemently dismiss my qualifications, credentials, and God's voice within me. In June 2018, I was appointed to The Johns Island Parish in the Charleston District and my female peers as well as my male peers, began to push away from me because many people believed that I was given an appointment that should have been given to a male. While many of the church members were excited to have someone new, they too had desires and hopes for a male pastor. I have always journeyed through the thickness of my skin, but for many days I had to deal with the thought of not being wanted. I believe that fear, flawed generational and cultural traditions, coupled with faulty theology were the reasons of why so many people are less open to female leadership. These same issues molest home life, church life, business life and personal lives of African American women daily on Wadmalaw Island. The United Women in Faith struggle with loving self and thus they struggle with loving one another. Daily, I encounter women who cannot move forward in their leadership positions at church and on their jobs because of rejection by others, which maintain women should not lead, whether on a secular job or in ministry because those position (senior pastor, chief of police, fire chief, CEO, and CFO) are restricted for men only.

Job loss during Covid has played a big role in many of the silent horrors on the island. Many families are single parent homes, and many homes are senior citizens struggling to raise young children. Statistics show that in the last fifteen years on Wadmalaw Island, 56.0% married, 26.3% never married, 1.4% separated, 10.3% widowed and 7.4% are divorced.⁹

I found it somewhat troubling that Citydata.com suggests that “in educational-level population of twenty-five years and over on Wadmalaw Island, men occupy most leadership positions, while females outnumber men in births and completion of high school.”¹⁰ Yet, personal knowledge and conversations with surrounding clergy show that Wadmalaw Island has the lowest number of female leaders in churches and most businesses. This is a generational and cultural understanding that a woman’s place is at home or at best in a domestic area of business.¹¹

This synergy paper is designed to identify the seamless connection between my ministerial journey, personal experiences, and the context in which I currently serve. This intersection between the three became apparent after reviewing my journey and critically examining the context. The common thread is the conduit that catalyzes a ministry project carefully designed and implemented to address a specific need in the identified context. Research, observations, and experiences indicate that the stated need is not limited to Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina; therefore, this project will be designed as a

⁹ Moving Ideas, Wadmalaw Island, SC City Data, www.movingideas.org/wadmalaw-island-sc.

¹⁰ Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina (SC 29487), “profile,” city-data.com.

¹¹ Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina (SC 29487), “profile,” city-data.com.

model that may be expanded and emulated in similar contexts beyond the original context.

I have witnessed as well as participated in many great missional works the Women's Circles have been involved in globally and locally. Some of them are clean-up after Hurricanes Hugo and Katrina, organizing and preparing pillowcase dresses for little girls in Africa, assisting families in health crisis, burn-out, and helping persons journey back from the loss of loved one's due to violence and advocating for many other great causes. Yet, little has been done to create a healthy space for women's health and specifically the need for African American women's health. Women of color generally may not feel comfortable or empowered to express authentically and bring their whole selves to the table.

Being an African American woman in a male dominated field has proven to be challenging due to the mindset of colleagues and parishioners that males are better suited for ministry than women. This is so even with the rise of Women in Ministry and the outstanding missional work of Women in Faith. Still, the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 has proven to be the gospel for many and controversial for others.

Many argue that women are moving in large numbers towards positions of growth, yet those same women are moving alone — most of the time with no spouse and children. Aloneness allows for greater harm and the inability to understand how to rally for others. Thus, many will consider female leaders in the Lowcountry as submissive because women in the Lowcountry continue to be seen but rarely heard. Women have proven time and time again that when women have the opportunity, they can certainly rise to the occasion and lead with strength, respect, and empathy.

Having more women in positions of leadership will not only help to guide the world towards a place where gender equality is the norm, but it will also help to illustrate a future of endless possibilities for young girls, so that they too can strive for greatness and aim to become formidable leaders one day. Make no mistake, I understand and celebrate the accomplishments of women who have paved the way, and I celebrate their achievements, but it is important to note that we are still far from a place where gender equality is a reality locally or globally.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, many gains that had been made towards gender equality over the years have been significantly set back. Millions of girls are still missing out on education, trafficking continues to be problematic, child marriage and gender-based violence are still a harsh reality across the globe, and women and girls are still fighting to have a say on what happens to their own bodies.¹² Ruth Bader Ginsburg eloquently encouraged women to “Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you.” Chief Master Sergeant of the Air Force JoAnne S. Bass asserted that, women need leaders at all levels who can think strategically and execute tactically.

Ministry Journey

In my days of tireless work and mental drain, I dare not forget that entrusted decision makers and leaders in any organization at any level go day to day with applause and criticisms for every decision made. As a pastor of a two-point charge, I can say that

¹² Leah Rodriguez “Why Do We Need a Global Gender-Responsive COVID-19 Recovery,” March 12, 2021, Global Citizen, <https://www.globalcitizen.org/en/content/global-gender-responsive-covid-19-recovery-plan>.

its often criticism, more criticism, and even still more criticism. The saying “heavy the head who wears the crown” is true. But occasionally, this special thing happens and reminds me in a significant way that I need to “stop and breathe.” I can remember one evening taking a moment to stop and pause after three meetings in a row and tangibly I saw my value. It was such a beautiful thing as if I could literally pick it up and hold it. It is the value connected to my life’s work only given by God. I only say that because I realize that so often, I continue to keep moving ahead to the next issue or challenge without any acknowledgment in the moment. It is frustrating at times but the reward in moments like that winter afternoon in 2023 is priceless because that is when God directed me to get up and enroll at United. My prayer each day, “let Thine will be done,” continues to refresh and revive in a real and fulfilling way. This journey with my United family has taught me to better understand the worth of prayer in community. Therefore, with my prayer community we share that-whatever life throws our way-We pray that God will let it reveal more and more of my/our purpose. In writing this paper, I am reminded of my intangible value, and it really reconnected me to my purpose. I have been asking God for far too long for that thing, that feeling, and when I least expect it, Jesus shows up and shares it. I am reminded of what value is, what value is not, what value looks like, and what value does not look like in my life, in my church and in my family. I am pretty sure I even got a glimpse of the intangible value around me. Keep your head up women. I am a living testimony that it will be alright, and God will change mindsets and hearts because whatever we are holding in, holding on to, and sheltering that is not of God, that God will set free the captive.

This intangible value has taught me that I work toward overcoming gender biases through perseverance which reminds me to stay the course, even when I do not want to, through stamina which requires the ability to sustain long hours of work while juggling work and family obligations and still achieving my goal, coupled with a positive mental attitude which makes the difference between experiencing misery or joy along the path, intertwined with the courage to overcome fear and self-doubt, and finally through a spirit of adventure. This means having a willingness to explore my own limits and view this dissertation journey as a quest filled with new learnings and discoveries.

As I look back on my life, I do not think I have ever cried as much as I did during my third year of pastoring because that is when I realized I was not as tough as I thought I was, or as cool, and if things were not going bad enough, I was diagnosed with breast Cancer. Yes, I fought many battles on my knees and cried so many tears in my secret place with God strengthening my soul. I know the joys and heartache of being in leadership and being a woman, an African American woman to be exact. It can be messy as well as complicated to minister to others, and it can be extremely challenging to minister to women, especially when you are the youngest woman in the room. We women can be difficult. The words women's ministries can even carry a negative undertone. Some people think it is simply a "craft auxiliary" or a "church clique." The truth is we desperately need healthy women investing in other women. As women fully embrace the life Christ offers, we experience healthier families, churches, workplaces, and communities.

As I shared earlier, I am in my seventeenth year of pastoring in the United Methodist Church. I have always loved the traditional church, and I have been actively

involved in the United Methodist Women — now known as United Women in Faith. The United Women in Faith is the only official organization for women within The United Methodist Church. In 2022, United Methodist Women (UMW) began doing business as United Women in Faith (UWF).¹³ The United Methodist Church has a long history of advocating for social justice. The early Methodists expressed their opposition to societal ills such as slavery, smuggling, inhumane prison conditions, alcohol abuse, and child labor. Today's United Methodist Women in Faith work, march and pray for racial justice, environmental care, and fair treatment for everyone. Whether they are in the pew or out of the pew, they rarely get the acknowledgement, support, or a moment to pause for self-care.

My life circumstances from childhood to professional development has contributed to my ministerial development. It has developed me not only as a Christian minister but also developed me as a person. It has taught me how to deal with conflict and conflict resolution. It has helped to strengthen me in that you cannot break me with how you talk to me because I have heard things and been told certain things in the church and out of the church. I press through diverse and crisis situations. I have not always had 100% family support, and I have had 100% family support.

Thus, my pursuit of a Doctor of Ministry degree is a natural progression in my ministerial and educational endeavors. This degree will help me develop a strong academic voice and strengthen my professional voice. I have already learned so much about who I am in preparation for the next level of this journey as I lead in such a manner

¹³ United Women of Faith, [https://Uwfaith.org/press/2022/united-mehodist-women-is-now-united-women-in-faith/March 7, 2022](https://Uwfaith.org/press/2022/united-mehodist-women-is-now-united-women-in-faith/March%207,%202022).

that will help other women identify and overcome patriarchal systems and practices that seek to reject the call of women and oppress women in leadership. Therefore, do what you must do, but I made my own resolve to “grow and go by faith!”

Develop the Synergy

Through the Women’s Circle, my hope, much like that of the Gospel Publishing House, is that as women come into our churches, they will receive healing and form healthy relationships. They will be more compassionate in reaching out to other women — increasing the church’s capacity to minister effectively.¹⁴ Church members continue to be given access to both educational and missional opportunities through The United Women in Faith School of Mission, formally known as United Methodist Women School of Mission, to engage through academic educational excellence and empowerment to make a missional impact on our community and the world as global leaders actively serving this present age. In a nutshell, the United Methodist Woman Circle coexists with the United Methodist Church to promote missions, to enhance the spiritual and ethical values of its members and volunteers, and to transform its community of women that are battling illnesses, while being victimized and vulnerable of domestic violence and sexual assault — from tragedy to triumph. During a class visit to Emory United Methodist Church in Washington, DC, Dr. Joe Daniels shared that by understanding what is happening in your mind and your community, you can be liberated.¹⁵

¹⁴ Gospel Publishing House, *A Quick Guide for Ministry to Women* (Ashland, KY: Gospel Publishing House, 2017), 10, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁵ Joseph Daniels, Emory UMC Washington, DC, Site Visit, March 20, 2023.

God created women for relationship. As women and leaders, we are designed by God to fulfill a unique calling. When we understand how we are designed, we can fully embrace the unique imprint God has placed on us and on those we serve. We are women designed by God to pursue the full life He offers. Throughout history the cultural role of women has changed greatly. However, the essence of how women respond to these changes has not. As women, we are called to relationship. This is a direct reflection of our Creator. God's intentional design is what sets women apart and solidifies our calling to ministry. In the Book of Genesis, we read the account of creation, where God created light and darkness, sea, and sky, and living creatures. Then, in Genesis 1:26, we see that God created man and woman. The text uses the pronoun "us."

Anita Lustrea, in her book *What Women Tell Me*, reminds us about what it means to be a community. She shares that, "It is our first clue that God exists in community: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We were made in the image of a Trinitarian God. We are created for –born for – relationship."¹⁶ Again, in the New Testament, we see how God creates community by sending Jesus, who is "Emmanuel, God with us." He "modeled community by choosing disciples who walked with Him. A group of bumbling fishermen, tax collectors, and women followed Him everywhere during His earthly ministry." Jesus lived in community with many. We read in 1 Corinthians 12 how we are the body of Christ and members of each other. We need each other to thrive! God created us for community.

An examination of my context and my ministerial journey proposes a natural convergence of systemic patriarchy and how it affects women, who have been called to

¹⁶ Anita Lustrea, *What Women Tell Me: Finding Freedom from the Secrets We Keep* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 21.

preach. My subjective experiences, along with my education and prior work with women in my proposed context, rightly suggest that many women who are called to lead do not readily accept that call because models of resisting patriarchal systems and practices are not within reach. Where is the community? I hope to not only analyze and illuminate the problem of patriarchy and its effects on African American women in leadership but to move toward practices and models that affirm and celebrate them.

Additionally, as I examined my current context, evidence suggests that most of the religious organizations locally and globally are steeped in patriarchy, which affects women not only in the church but in the community and the workplace.

As our society has evolved to the Information Age, studies show our nation is increasingly divisive and unloving towards person who are different and uncaring to the needs of women in all walks of life. Roughly forty million Americans move each year, and many Americans do not live near any nuclear family.¹⁷ The result is isolation. For some women, the isolation is imposed on them and for many the isolation is self-imposed. Many people want relationships and do not know how to open themselves to real community. As one woman said, “I am so lonesome for deep friendship with other women, but I do not know where to start.” These women walk into our churches looking for relief and hope. They long for deep relationships and spiritual support to help them withstand the stressors of everyday life. Let us look at some of the major needs of women.

Women need to understand the gift they receive when they are baptized in the Holy Spirit. Dr. George O. Wood, in his book *Living in the Spirit*, says:

¹⁷ Riordan Frost, “Who is Moving and Why? - Seven Question about Residential Mobility,” May 4, 2020, jchs.harvard.edu.

The fruit of the Spirit tells us God is far more concerned with who we are than what we're doing. If you're looking for God's will for your life, don't look . . . at where God wants you to go, or even what God wants you to do. Look . . . at what God wants you to be.¹⁸

It is said that ninety nine percent of knowing the will of God is being the person God wants you to be. Because if you are that person, you can go anywhere and do anything, and you will be guided by God and in God's will. The New Testament makes it clear that every person needs to die to the flesh (selfish desires) and become Spirit-empowered. It is the same resurrection power that raised Christ from the dead that now dwells in us. He empowers us to live an abundant life.¹⁹

As leaders, we must give each woman opportunities to discover her gifts and her ability to be involved in a myriad of compassion and missions' ministries in the church, neighborhoods, schools, and community. The principle of compassion embodies the Golden Rule, "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Mt 7:12). We need to quit trying to be awesome and instead be wise. Because if you do not know yet, trying to be awesome is only draining you dry which will continue to cause you to be in dismay.

I am committed to this project of creating pathways and self-awareness of the needs of Women in Leadership because of my personal experiences, wounds, and pains. I whole heartedly believe that my experiences are not new or unusual when it comes to African American women in ministry, African American women in the church and African American Women seeking leadership positions. As much as I try to get away from this work, God keeps pulling me back to my purpose because women are still being

¹⁸ George O. Wood, *Living in the Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 2009), 120-121.

¹⁹ This is a paraphrase of Romans 8:13.

called and they are still being rejected or simply ignored. I am compelled to help women overcome the internal and external obstacles that prevent them from walking in their destiny. My biggest asset to helping other women is my story of rejection and moving through the patriarchal systems and practices to answer my call. You see, my home church struggled with recommending me to ministry because I am a woman. Many church leaders – and I am saddened to say that many women – sought ways to look pass my calling, but I continued to press forward.

My personal motto is, “where there is Christ, there is hope.” I am a God-fearing child of the King and believes that salvation is an experience in the heart and a confession of the mouth. I believe that we must seek out our personal and collective Heart Ministry to strengthen our discipleship and make genuine our love for one another. I believe that there is One Body and One Spirit; One Lord, One Faith and One Baptism; One God and Father of All, who is Over All, Through All and In All (Eph 4:5-7).

Abstract

The context is New Webster United Methodist Church located in the rural area of Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina. The problem is that New Websters United Methodist Church has a history of discriminating against female ministry leaders and/or women in general. The hypothesis is if ministry leaders participate in a six-week training about gender bias and discrimination in ministry, then they will be equipped to advocate for gender equality in Christian ministry. The methodology that will be used to evaluate this will be mixed methods that include daily use of a concept map, pre- and post-questionnaires, Bible devotion, and journaling. The goal is for women to undergo life and

faith change that lifts women leaders in New Webster to move from brokenness to wholeness with a better understanding of what/how stereotypes operate and a heightened ability to identify and address bias thinking in themselves as well as in others.

The data collected in this project will include surveys, meditation moments, open sharing, and journaling. It is my hope that this data will help to create pathways of self-discovery and self-awareness. As a result, this project will be designed as a model that may be expanded and emulated in similar contexts beyond the original context to empower and change unhealthy generational and cultural mindsets towards women in leadership. When mindsets change, attitudes change, which suggest that focus then changes which seeks to liberate and transform.

CHAPTER TWO

BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

In looking back to the Industrial Revolution in the early 1800's, "men work" and "women work" became increasingly separated to the point that the Doctrine of Separate Spheres¹ became deep-rooted in people's thinking. Men and women were considered so different from each other that there could be no overlap in their skills or occupations. Any thought of men and women working side-by-side was out of the question. However, if we really delve into God's plan as it is written in Genesis 1:26-28, we read the following words,

²⁶Then God said, 'Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.'²⁷ So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them.²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, 'Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.'²

¹ Susan Steinbach, "Victorian era: historical period, United Kingdom," September 15, 2023, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Tess-of-the-DUrbervilles>.

² Genesis 1:26-28, NIV, unless otherwise noted, all references are from the *New International Version of the Bible*.

It is important to note that God gave both the man and the woman different tasks: to create families (populating the earth) and to subdue the earth, or more accurately, to be stewards or caretakers of God's creation. Often people assume that the first commandment about the family was given only to the woman while the second commandment about stewarding the earth was given only to the man. But that misreads the text. God gave both commandments to both the man and the woman. This would seem to imply that men should have family responsibilities as well as those in the workplace, and women should have workplace responsibilities as well as family responsibilities.

The church, which claims to be a beacon of hope to lost souls, continues to also be a haven for institutional discrimination against women in pastoral leadership, i.e., Roman Catholic Priesthood, Southern Baptist, Church of God in Christ, and many others. Yet, Philip Payne, in his book *Man and Woman: One in Christ*, shares that Jesus seemed to be unconcerned with gender differences in the kingdom of God. When a woman in the crowd says, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts you nursed," Jesus responded, "on the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it (Luke 11:27-28). Jesus affirmed that those who do the will of God are his brother and sister and mother (Mark 3:34-35; Matt 12:49-50; and Luke 8:21), showing that obedience, irrespective of gender, is more important than kinship.³

As a woman in ministry, my doctoral project focuses on the leadership principles for women in ministry in the context of a qualitative review of challenges and experiences addressing gender bias. Through this work, I will implement restorative

³ Philip Barton Payne, *Man and Woman, One in Christ: An Exegetical and Theological Study of Paul's Letters* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 57-58.

circles of training within New Webster United Methodist Church to build self-esteem and resilience. The issue that I witness within New Webster's church is that oppressed, underserved women exist in states of brokenness, hopelessness, and hardship. My hypothesis is that if ministry leaders participate in a six-week training about gender bias and discrimination in ministry, then they will be equipped to advocate for gender equality in Christian ministry. This builds self-esteem and resilience in leadership to transform mindsets from brokenness to hopefulness.

My project centers on the biblical text in Judges 4:4-16 (NIV)

⁴Now Deborah, a prophet, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. ⁵She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided. ⁶She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedeshin Naphtali and said to him, 'The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead them up to Mount Tabor. ⁷I will lead Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.' ⁸Barak said to her, 'If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go.' ⁹'Certainly I will go with you,' said Deborah. 'But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.' So, Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh. ¹⁰There Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali, and ten thousand men went up under his command. Deborah also went up with him. ¹¹Now Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites, the descendants of Hobab, Moses' brother-in-law, and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaanannim near Kedesh. ¹²When they told Sisera that Barak son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor, ¹³Sisera summoned from Harosheth Haggoyim to the Kishon River all his men and his nine hundred chariots fitted with iron. ¹⁴Then Deborah said to Barak, 'Go! This is the day the LORD has given Sisera into your hands. Has not the LORD gone ahead of you?' So, Barak went down Mount Tabor, with ten thousand men following him. ¹⁵At Barak's advance, the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and army by the sword, and Sisera got down from his chariot and fled on foot. ¹⁶Barak pursued the chariots and army as far as Harosheth Haggoyim, and all Sisera's troops fell by the sword; not a man was left.⁴

⁴ Judges 4:4-16.

Here we see Barak's lack of faith in verses 8 and 9 as Deborah gave him the Lord's instructions, Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." "Certainly, I will go with you," said Deborah. "But because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman." So, Deborah went with Barak to Kadesh.⁵

I believe that leaders such as Deborah exist amongst the women in New Webster Church in that these women are strong, self-confident, and lead by the Spirit of God. I further believe that by developing a safe space and given the encouragement to be open and honest in their own personal outlook and perspectives as it relates to competitive salaries, conflict, damaged emotions, past hurts, and harm, will aid them. These women of Faith, when given an opportunity to lead without barriers riddled with bias, will teach other women the importance of encouraging one another and participating without inflicting harm by word or deed. I have no desire to share or layout a comprehensive biblical argument for women to serve as church leaders because generational and cultural mindsets would only instill more oppressive thoughts and bring with it more hurts. Instead, I used this platform as a place to begin to question why women are discouraged from serving in areas where we feel God's call in our lives. My desire is to bring confidence through understanding scripture that has been used to discourage women from serving in leadership roles in the church. This issue is complex, and scholars as well as church goers continue to condemn one another on the "what's" and "why's" of women in leadership. It is important to understand that leadership in the church entails service. Leadership is not a right nor personal privilege based on gender as Genesis 1-3 shares

⁵ Judges 4:8-9.

that in the beginning, God created male and female in the image of God, as persons who could be equal heirs of eternal life as God's children. Also. In Genesis 1:26-27, God gave both male and female authority over earth and its creatures. Still many churchgoers remind us that in Genesis 2 God created the man before the woman but let us be clear in our thinking because no conclusion about authority is given from that text. The point being emphasized in Genesis 2 is that it is not good for a man to be alone. Digging deeper, we find that the Apostle Paul uses the Genesis text in selective ways. Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 11:7, that men are made in the image of God without mentioning that women are as well.

While Old Testament, in custom and law, gave men an advantage over women, Jesus noted in Matthew 19:8 that the laws of Moses did not prescribe an ideal society, but concessions of an imperfect society with rules for a different culture and a different covenant. Even though Israelite culture gave advantages to men, there are examples of women who had important roles. Deborah is one such woman. God chose Deborah to be a civil leader, a prophetess, and a judge over men. We find more and more women becoming Deborah leaders.

Judges 4:8-9 demonstrates that women are capable of leadership in today's struggles, so women must seek ways to work to dispel the cultural barriers which continue to block and stifle the growth and development of women — from the inside out. I hope that more women would study and believe Romans 2:11 (NIV), "For God does not show favoritism." As women, if we are going to become the leaders God has called us to be, we must believe ourselves to be worthy of the Lord's blessings knowing

that the gospel was not written just for the Jews, as explained through Peter in Acts 10:34-35,

Then Peter began to speak: ‘I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right.’⁶

My doctoral research through Restorative Circles will empower women leaders to understand the challenges and experiences that comes with gender biases. Women must come to trust that these biases do not exist in the eyes of God, but only in the eyes of those who continue to stifle the growth of women in leadership, women in the pulpits, women as college and university presidents, and women as President of the United States of America. If God did it for Deborah, God will certainly do it for women everywhere and in spaces everywhere — even in our own hearts and minds. Dr. Jacqueline Grant, my womanist theology professor at ITC, encouraged her class to “rethink the Christian faith from a woman’s perspective as an important advancement in modern theology.”⁷ Dr. Grant shared web sites, methods, and strategies to introduce forward thinking ideas encouraging people to see feminism not as a threat to the church but as a challenging perspective that actually enhances the church’s life in today’s world.

It is important to understand that the challenge of liberation theology is not merely to take into account the perspectives of those doing theology, but also to look more closely at the life and experience of marginalized and oppressed people. The change in perspective advocated by liberation theologians requires us to ask how justice can be

⁶ Acts 10:34-35.

⁷ Jacqueline Grant, “Class Lecture on Womanist Theology,” Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia, September 13, 2005.

done through theology and through the life of the church to bring about wholeness and birth leaders from all walks of life.

Napoleon Bonaparte was quoted as saying, “A leader’s role is to define reality and then give hope.”⁸ Some people believe leaders are born, while others insist they are made. Deborah’s story in the 4th chapter of Judges is one of sound leadership and great potential. Deborah, a female prophet, sits beneath her palm tree, judges Israel, summons the war commander Barak, provides military and tactical instructions, and accompanies the commander to battle. In the biblical text, Deborah exhibits characteristics that many readers have felt should never be encouraged in women. Her assertive behavior seemed at odds with the apostolic instructions: “A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet” (1 Tm 2:11-12, NIV).⁹

Exegesis

Unwarranted criticisms by evangelical scholars of Deborah’s leadership in Judges Chapter 4 continues to devalue her work as “abnormal” or “wrong.”¹⁰ Yet, the theme in the book of Judges is “When leaders lead, others will follow.” Deborah’s biblical story is one of the few which featured female abilities and leadership. It is a wonderful example of how God can use any person who wants to be His servant. In fact, God used people

⁸ GreystoneGlobal.com, “A leader is a dealer in hope,” June 19, 2016, <https://greystoneglobal.com/a-leader-is-a-dealer-in-hope/>.

⁹ 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

¹⁰ Wayne Grudem, *Countering the Claims of Evangelical Feminism: Biblical Responses to the Key Questions* (London, UK: Westminster, The Crown Publishing Group, 2010), 76-78.

like Abigail to save her household from disaster (1 Sm 25), refusing to be hampered by patriarchal strictures. Abigail defied gender roles in order to keep a workplace dispute from escalating to murder and genocide; God used Huldah to speak the word of the Lord to the king (2 Chr 34:14-33); there is only one mention of Huldah, the prophetess, in the whole Word of God; but that mention is highly honorable. Nothing is told of Huldah's pedigree or of any other thing whatsoever regarding her but that of a king, a high priest, and a learned scribe who could get nearer to God. This speaks much for the saintliness of this woman. This tells a tale which the greatest eloquence could not tell. Huldah must have been a woman of prayer, leading, perhaps, a very retired life, but a life of power. I dare not fail to mention that God used Mary of Nazareth as the mother of Jesus. Mary's all-important role in the Bible goes without saying. After all, she was the one who gave birth to the world's Savior when she was just a teen.

The story of Deborah in the Bible shows us that the Lord calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things that can only be accomplished through the Spirit and God does not choose any person or gender. *Enduring Word Biblical Commentary* states of Deborah, a prophetess: "some consider it unexpected for God to raise up a woman as a prophetess. But the New Testament makes it clear that God grants the gift of prophecy unto women also, and they are to practice it appropriately (1 Corinthians 11:5)."¹¹

In the biblical text, many church goers are taught that Deborah exhibits characteristics that many readers feel should never be encouraged in women. Her assertive behavior seemed at odds with the apostolic instructions: "A woman should learn

¹¹ David Guzik, "1st Corinthians 11 – Concerning Women, and The Lord's Supper," *Enduring Word Bible Commentary*, 2018, <https://enduringword.com/bible-commentary/1-corinthians-11/>.

in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet” (1 Tm 2:11-12, NIV).¹²

Yet, this text undergirds the reality that God will also call a woman to the highest level of leadership and sometimes it will be during a crisis. As the Israelites settled into the Promised Land, they often strayed from faith in the Lord. Human sacrifice, ritual prostitution, and other practices often replaced the worship of the Lord. When this happened, God allowed neighboring nations to conquer Israel. When someone would cry out to God for deliverance, the Lord would raise up a leader to organize a military campaign to throw off the oppressor. We meet Deborah at such a time. This Judges text states that the northern tribes in Israel were cruelly oppressed by King Jabin and his well-skilled military.

We first see Deborah in her day-to-day job duties as judge over all the people of the land. The Bible tells us that Deborah was a prophet, a judge, and a wise woman. Our text says, “Deborah sat under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment.”¹³ The text further tells us that after hearing of the oppression of the two tribes in the north, Deborah the prophet, stepped into a different leadership role. It is important to understand that Deborah could have easily remained safely in her hill country while ignoring the plight of the Israelites in the northern flat lands under Jabin’s conquest. But a true leader – male or female – who can come to the aid of the helpless, will do so.

¹² 1 Timothy 2:11-12.

¹³ Judges 4:4-5.

Deborah commanded Barak (a Northerner) to raise an army of 10,000 armed men whom God would use to defeat the superior forces of King Jabin. It happened that Jabin had nine hundred iron chariots and Israel had none; Israel's soldiers were outgunned but God gave Deborah, the prophet, a plan for battle. However, Barak, whom one might refer to as a nervous wretch, just thinking about what is before him, insisted that Deborah stand by his side during the battle or he would not take on the assignment. Some Christians have the notion that men should not work under a woman's direction, but here Barak and Deborah made a successful team with Deborah as his leader.

It is of great importance to recognize that resistance was never the case with Deborah, who was thought to be an Ephraimite because she resided in Ephraim. She was a judge and led Israel for sixty years in the 12th century before Christ. Her oversight covered approximately twenty years of national hardship before the Canaanite war and the peaceful forty years aftermath. Arguably, Deborah was first and foremost recognized as a female prophet, then as a judge, then a leader in a military role, and even as a songstress. Also, she was a courageous warrior, a poet, and a mother. The book of Judges rightfully identifies Deborah as one of the most influential women of the Bible.

Biblically, Deborah was and is in good company with other important prophetesses in the Bible: Moses' sister Miriam in Exodus 15:20; Huldah in 2 Kings 22:15; Anna in Luke 2:36; and Phillip's daughters in Acts 21:8-9.

In the Book of Judges, Deborah was one of the rulers of the Hebrews (and the only female leader) in the Old Testament. These rulers were called *mishpat*,¹⁴ which is

¹⁴ Biblestudytools.com, "Judges 4," in *Matthew Henry Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2023, <https://www.biblestudytools.com/judges/4.html>.

translated as “judges.” This dates back to a role that originated in the Book of Exodus when Moses appointed helpers to assist him in resolving arguments among the people. Judges sought guidance from the Lord by praying and meditating before proclaiming their ruling on a matter. Many of the judges were also thought of as prophets who articulated a word from the Lord.¹⁵

Again, it is important to repeat that Deborah would sit under the palm tree between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites would line up for her to rule on matters. This same woman of God, name Deborah, received instructions from God, called Barak, an Israelite warrior, to bring 10,000 troops up Mount Tabor to attack Sisera, Jabin’s commander of troops. Barak responded by saying “If you will go with me, I will go; if not I will not go”.¹⁶ In the next verse, Deborah agrees to go to battle with Barak and the troops but shares with him that: “there will be no glory for you in the course you are taking, for then the Lord will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.”¹⁷ Judge and warrior Deborah went off to battle with Barak, and, as foretold in prophecy, Sisera fell at the hands of a woman — but not Deborah. Rather it was Jael, the wife of a clan leader, who would avenge the Israelites by driving a tent peg through Sisera’s head with a mallet when he asked for water and respite.

Biblical commentaries and scholars disagree on Barak’s acceptance of Deborah’s battle leadership. Some feel that Barak respected her as a leader and prophetess and willingly followed her call. Others, however, concluded that Barak’s response in Judges

¹⁵ Exodus 18-22.

¹⁶ Judges 4:8.

¹⁷ Judges 4:9.

4:8 pointed to his discomfort in taking orders from a woman, despite the Deborah's overall leadership and respect.¹⁸

If we are honest with ourselves, we can all agree that Deborah was the model leader, equal to the greatest leaders of Israel. No other judge was also called a prophet, which points to how closely Deborah resembles Moses and Joshua. As a prophet, she had an unshakable faith in God, which gave her strength to lead her people. She knew that it was the Lord who overcame the enemy. She was merely an instrument of God.

It is also very important to understand and know that not every man nor every woman is called to lead. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that Psalm 115:9-11 reminds every woman that God is our *ezer*, meaning God is your only hope.¹⁹ Thus, like Deborah, our confidence is in God, not in ourselves. We too can march on with might because we do so in the strength of the Lord our God.²⁰

Women of God must always remember that our relationship with God gives us a different perspective on life. We know what matters. We know what lasts and what passes away. And we choose to live for what is eternal. We bring that perspective to every choice we make — whether to plan ahead and work with care, whether to show compassion, whether to be a person of integrity, whether to respect ourselves as we respect others, whether to pursue our goals with diligence, and whether to control our tongues. Women of God, we choose whether or not to be wise:

¹⁸ David J. H. Beldman, *Judges*, The Two Horizons Old Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2020), 83-85.

¹⁹ Mark D. Roberts, “Best of Daily Reflections: Trust the Lord, Your Helper and Your Shield,” October 3, 2014, <https://www.theologyofwork.org/the-high-calling/daily-reflection/trust-lord-your-helper-and-your-shield/>.

²⁰ Psalm 115:9-11.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox, in her 1916 poem, “Tis The Set of The Sail,” puts it this

way:

One ship sails East, and another West,
By the self-same winds that blow.
Tis the set of the sails, and not the gales
That tell the way we go.
Like the winds of the sea are the waves of time,
As we journey along through life.
Tis the set of the soul that determines the goal,
And not the calm or the strife.
It is the set of the soul that determines the goal.²¹

In other words, in every part of life in your family and in your workplace, make it your goal to live wisely, always consider what lasts forever. If you do, you will choose to be trustworthy, wise, generous, diligent, and in control of your tongue. But even more, you will know the difference between what passes away and what lasts, and you will choose to give yourself to what lasts for eternity. When we look back over the women at work in the Old and New Testaments, we see all of them taking the long view, choosing to live for what ultimately matters. That is the choice God also gives each of us every day.

Nevertheless, too often churches and families have used scripture to put up roadblocks to oppress and discourage women in positions of leadership. One such Scripture is 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, where Paul wrote:

As in all the congregations of the saints, women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church.²²

²¹ Ella Wheeler, “Tis The Set of The Sail,” Poetry for Every Occasion, <https://www.poetrynook.com>.

²² 1 Corinthians 14:34-35.

If we take this literally, it will mean that women are not allowed to sing in church nor respond when the pastor asks for comments or questions in church meetings and conferences. Moreover, it would contradict what Paul said in chapter 11, where he said that women could pray and prophesy in church if they had the appropriate attire. Common sense, church custom, and good principles of biblical interpretation all say that we should not take these verses literally — and almost no one does. It is important that we understand that Paul is not making a blanket statement that women can never speak in church. Rather, Paul was sharing his comments to address a particular situation in Corinth of disorderly speaking in meetings.

Deborah and her story, teaches obedience and courage. Women should believe that if God is telling you to do something or go somewhere; despite your fears, listen to God's call. Remember, "God does not call the qualified, He qualifies the called." Journeying outside of your comfort zone to glorify God can be terrifying, but faith was never promised to be easy. Be always courageous for God's glory and do not waiver in your faith. No one knows what the road ahead looks like, but we only need to remember that God will faithfully guide us and lead the way.

Deborah is one of the most influential women of the Bible. She is known for her wisdom and courage, and she is the only woman of the Old Testament who is known for her own faith and action. It is empowering and chilling to understand that Deborah is not validated or known because of her relationship to her husband or any other man.

As a prophet and as a judge, Deborah was said to hear God's voice and share God's Word with others. As a priestess, Deborah did not offer sacrifices, as the men did, but she

did lead worship services and preach. Yes, many biblical scholars believe that Deborah was a wife, as well. Dr. Mafico's class notes states that, in Hebrew, the same word is used for "woman" and "wife," so we do not know with certainty if Deborah was a "woman of Lappidoth" (a place) or the "wife of Lappidoth" (a person).²³

Stanley Grenz notes that the gospel "radically altered the position of women, elevating women to a partnership with men unparalleled in first-century society."²⁴ This is seen in the New Testament. The following list is of first-century women ministers and church leaders mentioned in the New Testament: "Philip's daughters (Acts 21:9); Priscilla (Acts 18:26 and Rom 16:3-5); Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2); Junia (Romans 16:7); possibly Chloe (I Cor 1:11); Euodia and Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3); Nympha (Col 4:15); Apphia (Phlm 2): 'the chosen lady' (2 John 1); 'the chosen sister' (2 John 13); and probably Lydia (Acts 16:40)."²⁵

Dr. Jacqueline Grant, who taught Systematic Theology and Womanist Theology at The Interdenominational Theological Seminary in Atlanta, Georgia, where I received my Master of Divinity degree, embodied inclusion and full participation of women in the life and work of the church and the society. Dr. Grant has established and organized many groups to help women understand and examine the construction of stereotypes in the church. Dr. Grant said, "women are the vast majority of active participants in their

²³ Temba Mafico, "Old Testament Seminar," Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta Georgia, January 12, 2005.

²⁴ Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 78.

²⁵ Stanley J. Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 78.

churches, yet women's work tends to be undervalued."²⁶ Grentz and Grant reiterate that the church as a whole has been very slow to embrace the New Testament ideal of equality and mutuality among people regardless of race and gender (Gal 3:28).

It is important to reiterate that feminist theologians analyze the situation of women in church and society, past and present. This critical analysis is not restricted to those theological texts that deal explicitly with women or are written by women, but it is concerned with all texts in all aspects of life as they create and shape the situation of women. This can be achieved by speaking explicitly about women or by denying the existence of women and the relevance of women's lives for doing theology.

Summary

Serving as a pastor in the United Methodist Church has shown me time and time again of the importance of never being content. While the United Methodist Church has been very supportive of women in leadership positions in and out of the church, we still have a long way to go. Women continue to be overlooked by male peers and mocked by their fellow peers concerning leadership abilities and our God-Given right to lead as well as our passion to obtain a seat at the table. In my seventeen years pastoring, I have seen women who have climbed the ladder of success and they get their alone — alone meaning with no husband, no children, and very few real friends. I pray that women will embrace the need for "sisterhood" and through "healing circles of empowerment" gain the ability to embrace a more fulfilling way of leading which would be one that

²⁶ Jacqueline Grant, "Class Lecture on Womanist Theology," Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia, September 13, 2005.

encourages sharing and laughter, hope and joy, peace and happiness, structure and stability as we find mental strength and begin to truly lead others. Woman should not have to give up their rights in the public or community in return for the freedom to have the time to raise and care for her family. Therefore, women must be willing to preserve. Carol M. Roberts stated in *The Dissertation Journey*, that “*Perseverance* is that attitude that impels you to go on resolutely, in spite of obstacles, criticism, adversity, fears, or tears to overcome the inevitable discouragement and disappointment that accompanies mountainous-type projects.”²⁷ Deborah persevered despite the challenges that came her way, and with the load she was trusted as judge and prophet.

The Book of Judges in the Bible makes my heart burst with excitement as I pondered how God might use me in my generation as He used the judges in theirs. I understand that women have made great strides in climbing the ladder of leadership, but make no mistake, we have a long way to go. Women must support and encourage one another. Maya Angelou says it this way, “Each time a woman stands up for herself, without knowing it possibly, without claiming it, she stands up for all women.”²⁸

Women have proven time and time again that when we have the opportunity, we can certainly rise to the occasion and lead with strength, respect, and empathy. The Book of Judges provides a road map of the abilities and strength of women in positions of leadership. Deborah demonstrates that as we retell Bible stories of women in

²⁷ Carol M. Roberts, *The Dissertation Journey: A Practical and Comprehensive Guide to Planning, Writing, and Defending Your Dissertation*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin: A SAGE Company 2010), 14.

²⁸ Tamara Xu, “Maya Angelou: Feminism and Women Empowerment,” Growth for Green, November 20, 2020, <https://www.growthforgreen.org/post/maya-angelou-feminism-and-women-empowerment>.

leadership, these stories help to knit us together as a body, to remind us of who we are as a people, and to inspire us as we continue to walk with Christ, trusting, equipping, and supporting women in leadership. These Bible stories can also help to guide the world towards a place where gender equality is the norm, as well as illustrate a future of endless possibilities for young girls, so that they too can strive for greatness and aim to become formidable leaders one day.

God chose to place leaders not solely because of their skill, but because of their character. The Bible is a constant reminder that great leaders have balanced skills with great character. “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves” (Philippians 2:3).²⁹ The New Testament Book of Philippians emphasizes the importance of humility in leadership. It suggests that leaders should avoid being self-centered or seeking to impress others and instead should focus on serving others and putting their needs first. By being humble and considering others to be more important than themselves, leaders can foster a positive and supportive environment and build strong relationships with those they lead. This character was paramount with Deborah.

Nineteenth-century women used Deborah’s story to argue for their right to preach, lecture publicly, hold political office, vote in elections, and enter the political sphere as men’s equals. Deborah was a potent example for nineteenth-century proponents of women’s leadership in church and society. The nineteenth century experienced a virtual explosion of women’s preaching. During the revivalism of the Second Great Awakening (c. 1790- 1844), hundreds of American women felt called to preach the gospel and were

²⁹ Philippians 2:3.

“a prominent part of the evangelical landscape.”³⁰ Many evangelical Protestants, especially in Methodist and Baptist traditions, regarded women’s preaching as a sign that they were living in “the latter days,” when the Holy Spirit would be poured out upon male and female alike (Joel 2:28-29). Though numerous nineteenth-century clergymen did support women’s right to speak publicly, women preachers and exhorters encountered considerable opposition from detractors.³¹

These detractors are in every denomination and in every city and state. As I am working on this project petitioning for the rights and equality of women in leadership, I am further oppressed by the Southern Baptist Convention ruling to expel all females from leading in the church effective immediately. Indeed, my heart bleeds and my self-esteem is bruised but not broken by this ruling agreed upon by a majority, of women. Yet, as I listen to Meghan Daniels’ interview with Bishop McKinstry, I am encouraged, as this is one of those times that reading God’s Word has helped me to understand God’s grace or unmerited favor. You see, the Southern Baptist ruling made female clergy feel unworthy and unaccepted of grace, but as I listened to Bishop McKinstry making her stance clear, that folk cannot pick and choose. This interview reminds me of God’s grace, which is God’s love. Bishop McKinstry stated that, “If a woman can carry Jesus, the Word, in her womb and birth Him, why can’t we carry the living word, and give birth to it?”³² Bishop Pat McKinstry is the pastor of Worship Center Church in Toledo, Ohio, and she has been a bishop for decades. She knows this debate too well because she lived it. After sixty-four

³⁰ Catherine A. Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims: Female Preaching in America, 1740-1845* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 134.

³¹ Brekus, *Strangers and Pilgrims*, 137.

³² Pat McKinstry, “interview,” by Meghan Daniels, WTVG, Toledo, Ohio. June 15, 2023.

years in ministry and thirty-four years as a pastor, the bishop says her work speaks for itself.

Bishop McKinstry continues, “If they feel that a woman can’t preach and can’t be an elder and women are meant to keep silent, then take women out of your choirs, don’t let women give any announcement, don’t let women be your Sunday school teachers. If you’re going to silence women, totally silence women.”

Bishop McKinstry gave this advice for women with strong convictions to lead. “If you know you’re called into a certain area of ministry, if you’re in a place that doesn’t accept you, leave that place. Don’t fight that place but leave that place and do the work of the ministry.”³³

Meghan Daniels went on to say that many of the Southern Baptist Churches in the area have been silent on this ruling, but some were willing to tell 13 Action News they are “repulsed” by the decision.

Word Study

A word study of Deborah shows the reader things about this judge. The name Deborah, (the judge), is found “in the Hebrew lexicon as (דְּבוֹרָה, devorah; honeybee). Judge over Israel who led the Israelite army to victory over the Canaanites.”³⁴ She was a

³³ Pat McKinstry, “interview,” by Meghan Daniels, WTVG, Toledo, Ohio. June 15, 2023.

³⁴ Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, s.v., “deborah,” *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Unabridged*, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission. BibleSoft.com.

prophetess who judged Israel. The proper name for Deborah is דְּבוֹרָה — a proper name, feminine (bee). She was a prophetess of Israel.”³⁵

The central thought in this lesson is judgment based on spiritual discrimination. This is represented by Deborah (meaning “a bee,” in the sense of a keener perception than is known to the five senses). What is the significance of the palm tree of Deborah? Her headquarters were under the “Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim” (Judges 4:5) which was a central spot north of Jerusalem. The palm tree was a symbol of justice as it provided an open, neutral place to arbitrate; and where everyone could hear. Deborah is one of the most influential women of the Bible. As a prophet, Judge Deborah was said to hear God’s voice and share God’s Word with others. As a priestess, she did not offer sacrifices, as the men did, but she did lead worship services and preach.

Deborah is one of the most influential women of the Bible. She is known for her wisdom and courage and is the only woman of the Old Testament who is known for her own faith and action, not because of her relationship to her husband or another man. As a prophet, Judge Deborah was said to hear God’s voice and share God’s Word with others. Many biblical scholars believe that Deborah was a wife, as well. However, in Hebrew, the same word is used for “woman” and “wife,” so we do not know with

³⁵ Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, s.v., “deborah,” *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon, Unabridged*, Electronic Database. Copyright © 2002, 2003, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved. Used by permission. BibleSoft.com.

certainty if Deborah was a “woman of Lappidoth” (a place) or the “wife of Lappidoth” (a person).³⁶

Who Was Deborah

Deborah’s story is told in prose and poetry (in Judges 4 and 5). She has an impressive resume as judge, warrior, poet, and prophetess, as well as singer and songwriter. She was only one of five women described as a prophet in the Old Testament. The four others are Mirriam, Huldah, Noadiahm and the prophetess in Isaiah 8:3. The only other person in the Bible who was said to be both prophet and judge was Samuel. Deborah is the only female judge mentioned in the Bible.³⁷ The only female judge, the only one to be called a prophet, and the only one described as performing a judicial function, Deborah is a decisive figure in the defeat of the Canaanites. As of a literary observation, Judges 4 and 5 speaks of a victory in two accounts — a prose narrative and a poem known as the Song of Deborah.³⁸

Deborah

In Hebrew, the name Deborah (*D’vorah*) is translated as “bee.” The Midrash (a collection of teachings on the Torah) explains that the Hebrew people are said to be like bees in several ways:

1. Just as bees follow their leader in a swarm, the Jewish people follow the sages and prophets to teach them.

³⁶ Susan J. Nelson, “What we Can Learn About Courage and Faith from Deborah,” July 10, 2019, Christianity.com.

³⁷ Susan J. Nelson, “Who Was Deborah in the Bible?” July 10, 2019, Christianity.com.

³⁸ J. Cheryl Exum, “Mother in Israel: A Familiar Story Re-considered,” in *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Letty M. Russell (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1985), 73-85.

2. As a bee sting is quite painful, but the bee's honey is incredibly sweet, God's Word will sting those who do not follow His commands but will bless those who live righteously with a sweet life.
3. Bees collect pollen and nectar, not for their own benefit, but for the benefit of others, just as the Hebrews collect mitzvahs (a good deed done for others or religious benefit) for the Lord's pleasure and benefit.
4. Bees are a lowly insect, which is a reminder to God's children to be humble.³⁹

Prophetess

The word “prophetess” in the Hebrew is (*ne vi ‘ah*,) נְבִיאָה, “an ancient type endowed with gift of song.”⁴⁰

Wife

According to *Strong's Hebrew Lexicon*, “feminine, woman, married (*‘es set*). This is a feminine construct.”⁴¹

Lappidoth

Lappidoth is masculine and singular in nature. Strong's describes it as “a torch, the husband of Deborah the prophetess in the tie of judges (*lap pi do wt*) לָפִידוֹת.”⁴²

³⁹ Biblehub.com, s.v. “*d’voarah*,” <https://biblehub.com/strongs/judges/4-4.htm#>.

⁴⁰ Biblehub.com, s.v. “*ne vi ‘ah*” <https://biblehub.com/strongs/judges/4-4.htm#>.

⁴¹ Biblehub.com, s.v. “*‘es set*,” <https://biblehub.com/strongs/judges/4-4.htm#>.

⁴² Biblehub.com, s.v. “*lap pi do wt*,” <https://biblehub.com/strongs/judges/4-4.htm#>.

Judging

“Judging” is a “verb, feminine in nature i. e., to judge, govern vindicate, punish, (*Qap*) to act as law giver, to decide controversy (if God, man).”⁴³

Conclusion

Awareness is indeed needed because women continue to be discriminated against in some way, shape, or form; yet we read in the Book of Judges 4 that Deborah receives the prophecies of the Lord as the Lord’s agent and deliverer. Deborah catalyzes others to acts of delivery. Athalya Brenner, in her book *A Feminist Companion to Judges*, contends that through the authority of divine spirit, Deborah judges the Israelites and calls males to her; however, Brenner concurs with critics that Deborah needs Barak, a male, to fulfill her prophecies. Deborah accompanies Barak to the battlefield but not to battle; she draws the fighting forces of men together (4:6-7) so that the Lord can act through them (4:15). Brenner states that, “many feminist critics use the Book of Judges to describe roles of women arguing that Deborah extends the idea of womanhood in that she may direct man to carry out the will of the Lord (presumably male), but in this text she cannot, as female, do it herself.”⁴⁴ I would like to bring awareness to the fact that Deborah was a mature woman portrayed in the text in a positive light as both active and resourceful which to me portrays character.

⁴³ Biblehub.com. “Judges 4:4 - *Qap*,” biblehub.com/Strong/Judges/4-4.

⁴⁴ Athalya Brenner-Idan, ed, *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 25.

My final thought on this matter is to show the importance of growing and supporting women in leadership and to remind men and women that women have been faith leaders since biblical times. And with all the turmoil in the world today, we can relate to Deborah as a role model who lived in troubled times. After twenty years of oppression, while most of her people cowered in fear, we read Judges 5 and see God awakened within Deborah a zeal to do something. As Deborah awoke, she arose as a leader to awaken others to stand up and fight. Women of faith must seek to lead with the strength and wisdom of Deborah in this cruel and evil world because when leaders lead, others will follow. Wake up!

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

This chapter entitled Historical Foundation, against the backdrop of the theme of this paper, will provide leadership principles for women in New Webster United Methodist Church's United Women in Faith auxiliary, where women face gender discrimination concerning where and how women lead. While the United Methodist Church has been a forerunner in ordaining and appointing women in ministry, there is still much work to be done.

John Wesley, Methodism's founder, believed that the living core of the Christian faith is revealed in Scripture — illuminated by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. In The United Methodist Church, this way of examining Scripture and doing theology is referred to as the Wesleyan quadrilateral. Wesley's position, and the position of The United Methodist Church, is that Scripture is primary. *The United Methodist Book of Discipline* notes, however, that the Christian witness, "even when grounded in Scripture and mediated by tradition, is ineffectual unless understood and appropriated by the individual. To become our witness, it must make sense in terms of our own reason and experience."¹

¹ *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church 2016*, "Paragraph 105/Section 4" (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 83.

What matters most, according to *The Book of Discipline*, is that “all four guidelines be brought to bear in faithful, serious, theological consideration. Insights arising from serious study of the Scriptures and tradition enrich contemporary experience. Imaginative and critical thought enables us to understand better the Bible and our common Christian history.”²

However, we see that one reference from Paul appears to rule out the ordination of women in many denominations, but The United Methodists also take into account other scriptural references as well as our tradition, experience, and reason.

The United Methodist Church’s Social Principles, by polity and practice, supports the full inclusion of women in every aspect of church life. Our Social Principles, while not to be considered church law, are a prayerful and thoughtful effort on the part of the General Conference to speak to the human issues in the contemporary world from a sound biblical and theological foundation as historically demonstrated in United Methodist traditions.

The United Methodist Church believes God’s love for the world is an active and engaged love, a love seeking justice and liberty. We cannot just be observers. So, we care enough about people’s lives to risk interpreting God’s love, to take a stand, to call each of us into a response, no matter how controversial or complex.³

The church helps us think and act out a faith perspective, not just responding to all the other mind-makers-up that exist in our society. Among groups that specifically work to eliminate sexism and promote the full inclusion of women are the General

² *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, “105 Section 4” (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 83.

³ *The Book of Resolutions of The United Methodist Church 2016*, “160 Social Principles,” (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 27.

Commission on Status and Role of Women and the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry.

The Methodist Episcopal Church licensed and ordained women as local preachers in the early 1920s. However, that position changed in 1939 at the time of union with the Methodist Episcopal Church South and the Methodist Protestant Church. In 1956 full clergy rights were granted to women in The Methodist Church. The last of the mainline Protestant denominations, (The Episcopal Church), did not approve ordination of women until 1976.⁴

Allies and adversaries agree that in scripture, the only text that explicitly sets the limit on women to be silent is 1 Timothy 2:11. The verse, if taken literally, actually contradicts the chapter, which is addressing public prayer. Men are instructed to pray without anger and doubt, and women are similarly instructed to be decent and modest in appearance. While the instructions for public prayer to men refer to attitude, the directive to women specifies outward appearances (which reflects inner attitudes). I am inclined to consider this single limiting instruction in the context of the many directives throughout scripture encouraging believers to go and make disciples of Jesus Christ. The Great Commission as it is written in Matthew 28:18-20 read,

Then Jesus came to them and said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.’

⁴ Tom McNally, “Commentary: Why do United Methodist Ordain Women when the Bible Specifically Prohibits it?” <https://www.umc.org/em/content/commentary-mcnally-why-do-united-methodists-ordain-women>.

In the context of first century Judaism, a directive to let women learn was not only countercultural, but a revolutionary notion that would effectively double the number of witnesses of Jesus Christ to all the world. Whereas previously, tradition forbade women from even being taught the scriptures, this text grants women the opportunity to learn in the same manner as men who previously had little knowledge of a subject. Dr. Jacqueline Grant stated in a class lecture that those early teachers such as Pythagoras required long periods of silence that were probably used as a form of moral discipline. She taught that the Greek word translated as silence used in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 is otherwise used to mean respectful attention or quiet demeanor rather than imposing total silence.⁵ Dr. Grant pointed out that scholars and churchgoers are divided on the meaning of women teaching in such a way as to take authority, which could mean to seize authority in an overbearing way or to gain headship over a man. The issues of headship and authority,

- 1) goes against the authority afforded Deborah, Phoebe, Pricilla, and Lydia;
- 2) categorizes the ministry of prophecy as less authoritative than teaching; and
- 3) regards spiritual instruction given privately to a man to be less authoritative than spiritual instruction given publicly to the general congregation.⁶

Discussions were seemingly combative at times with classmates trying to put a label on how to accept women in leadership, in authoritative positions in churches, in sports, in office, and everywhere in between.⁷ No one has a concern with referring to

⁵ Jacqueline Grant, "Class Lecture on Womanist Theology," Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia, October 4, 2005.

⁶ Jacqueline Grant, "Class Lecture on Womanist Theology," Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia, October 4, 2005.

⁷ Jacqueline Grant, "Class Lecture on Womanist Theology," Interdenominational Theological Center, Atlanta, Georgia, October 4, 2005.

women as evangelist, missionary and sister, even though, women are entering the workforce and gaining professional degrees at an increasing rate over our male counterpart. Women are still drastically underrepresented in leadership positions. My research is to address the discrimination women face in pursuit of leadership positions and how do women overcome the challenges of gender bias to achieve success. This qualitative research will help in determining why there is still such a large gender gap in leadership positions, as well as help us to better understand life experiences of successful women who are leaders.

Pioneering Women Preachers of the Faith

John Wesley, who was said to have been modeling the teachings of his mother, was the first within his movement to authorize a woman to preach, granting a license to Sarah Crosby in 1761. Fast forward 200 years, Marjorie Matthews in 1980 became the first woman bishop, followed four years later by the first African American woman bishop, Leontine T. Kelly. Paving the way for these women were valiant and courageous forerunners like Barbara Heck, Sojourner Truth, Fanny Crosby, Harriett Tubman, Martha Drummer, Mary McLeod Bethune, and many more.

Sarah Crosby

The story of Sarah Crosby is the story of John Wesley's change of heart toward women preachers. By the 1750s, John Wesley had not fully accepted women preachers. This is an odd situation when you consider that Methodist women were already operating in public. They were giving public prayers, public testimony, and public exhorting.

Regardless, at this time John Wesley did not give a full-fledged nod toward the sanctioning of women preachers.⁸

It can seem a bit confusing to distractors as to why John Wesley supported and authorized women to preach considering his hesitation but understanding comes when one remembers that the most influential person in Wesley's life was his mother, Susanna Wesley. At one point in John Wesley's childhood, when his father was away on religious business, his mother was leading and teaching a regular congregation of more than 200 people. In 1755, a conference document John Wesley presented allowed provisions for women preachers in exceptional cases.

In the document, John Wesley differentiates between the authority to preach and the authority to administer the sacraments. Once again for this distinction, John Wesley appeals to the early church: "Evangelists and deacons preached. Yea, and women when under extraordinary inspiration. Then both their sons and their daughters prophesied, although in ordinary cases it was not permitted to a woman to speak in the church."⁹

In 1750, Sarah Crosby joined John Wesley's Foundry Church in London. There she had the awesome privilege to hear both George Whitefield and John Wesley preach. Within two years, she became a class leader at Foundry Church. But this newfound love of God did not sit well with her husband. Within five years of attending The Foundry Church, she found herself abandoned by her husband who did not support women in ministry.

⁸ Francis Asbury, "Sarah Crosby Woman Preacher," <https://www.Francisasburytriptych.com>.

⁹ Francis Asbury, "Sarah Crosby and John Wesley," <https://www.Francisasburytriptych.com>.

Sojourner Truth

I would now like to concentrate on Sojourner Truth. Rosetta Ross, in her book *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights*, referenced what Fannie Lou Hamer called “keeping on down the freedom road.”¹⁰ She speaks of this as a clarion call to never give up and never give in. In the mid-nineteenth century, Sojourner Truth felt called by God to escape bondage, speak against slavery, agitate for women’s rights, and variously supported emancipated slaves.¹¹ Truth’s Civil War work earned her an invitation to meet President Abraham Lincoln in 1864. Sojourner Truth exemplifies bold humanity of one who has taken activism and unstoppable dedication to social justice, as well as intersectional feminism, as she advocated for the liberation of enslaved people and the emancipation of women. Truth recognized the interconnectedness of race and gender. She demonstrated the holistic nature liberation (of becoming free).

Born into slavery in Ulster County, New York, in 1796, Sojourner Truth’s experiences as a slave informed her later conversion to Methodism and her staunch commitment to abolition, women’s rights, and temperance. Sold several times during her early life, Truth, born with the name Isabella Baumfree, suffered under cruel masters. She recalled: “I had a severe, hard master, and I was tied up in the barn and whipped. Oh! Till the blood run down the floor.”¹²

¹⁰ Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 4.

¹¹ Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying*, 5.

¹² Sojourner Truth, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (Newburyport, MA: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 2008), 14, ProQuest Ebook Central.

But New York state gradually eliminated slavery, and in 1826, Truth was freed. She settled in New York City with her daughter, Sophia, where she experienced a powerful, divine vision. During this conversion, Truth recognized that she – and all other blacks and women – deserved equal rights under the law. “We had been taught that we was a species of monkey, baboon, or ‘rang-o-tang, and we believed it,”¹³ she recalled, but “some years ago there appeared to me a form . . . Then I learned that I was a human being.”¹⁴ After this experience, Baumfree changed her name to Sojourner Truth and began what would be her life-defining work. Truth became a Methodist itinerant preacher, traveling the country and sharing her interpretation of the Scripture with its powerful message of reform and equality.¹⁵

As an itinerant preacher, Truth met abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison and Frederick Douglass. Garrison’s anti-slavery organization encouraged Truth to give speeches about the evils of slavery. She never learned to read or write. In 1850, she dictated what would become her autobiography – *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* – to Olive Gilbert, who assisted in its publication. Truth survived on sales of the book, which also brought her national recognition. She met women’s rights activists, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, as well as temperance advocates — both causes she quickly championed.

In 1851, Truth began a lecture tour that included a women’s rights conference in Akron, Ohio, where she delivered her famous “Ain’t I a Woman?” speech. In it, she

¹³ Sojourner Truth, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (Newburyport, MA: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 2008), 14, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁴ Sojourner Truth, *The Narrative of Sojourner Truth* (Newburyport, MA: Open Road Integrated Media, Inc., 2008), 14, ProQuest Ebook Central.

¹⁵ The Library of Congress, “This Far by Faith Series,” 2003, www.pbs.org.

challenged prevailing notions of racial and gender inferiority and inequality by reminding listeners of her combined strength. (Truth was nearly six feet tall). Truth ultimately splits with Douglass, who believed suffrage for formerly enslaved men should come before women's suffrage; she thought both should occur simultaneously. Sojourner Truth postulated that all humans are equal in God's eyes and therefore should be equal on earth: "Does not God love colored children as well as white children? And did not the same Savior die to save the one as well as the other? If so, white children must know that if they go to Heaven, they must go there without their prejudice against color, for in Heaven black and white are one in the love of Jesus."¹⁶ For Truth, salvation was only available to those who had embraced abolition and equality

Webster Methodist Church of Wadmalaw Island

Truth died in 1883, the same year that Webster Methodist Church was founded. I recall stories of so much going on in the area of Wadmalaw Island, where slave ships were docking, and many islanders were still in bondage, that life was tough, and men were dominant leaders in the church. Mindsets were fashioned in such a way that signified a place of low status for women. Women were not allowed, nor did many share a desire to preach and teach. It was understood that women had a place in the church. Webster Church had a Circuit Rider preacher — the same status and title that Truth held. I attended several United Methodist Women workshops, School of Missions (Mission U), and women circle groups at my home church as well as every church that I pastored.

¹⁶ Debra Michals, "Sojourner Truth," National Women's History Museum, 2015, www.womenshistory.org.

These circles often tap into the invisibleness of women. Yet, women are the foundation of the church, the home, and women are very productive on their jobs. But women are rarely seen. No one senses the brokenness of women as women gain higher positions.

Nevertheless, women leaders continue to bring talents and new views alongside structural and cultural diversity to businesses and churches alike, resulting in more successful solutions. Women tend to study more minor details to see what is going on underneath the surface with diverse views and a sense of awareness. Maya Angelou reminds us, “Women should be tough, tender, laugh as much as possible, and live long lives. The struggle for equality continues unabated, and the woman warrior who is armed with wit and courage will be among the first to celebrate victory.”¹⁷

Clergywomen and United Methodism

Clergywomen have been part of Methodism since John Wesley licensed Sarah Crosby to preach in 1761. Although women were ordained in the Methodist tradition as early as the late 1800s, it was the May 4, 1956, General Conference vote for full clergy rights that forever changed the face of ordained clergy.¹⁸

¹⁷ Maya Angelou, *Wouldn't Take Nothing for My Journey Now* (New York, NY: Random House, 1993), 7.

¹⁸ The United Methodist Church, “Why Does the UMC Ordain Women,” United Methodist Communications, August 08, 2019, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-why-does-the-umc-ordain-women>.

The United Methodist Church continues to declare its belief in the full equality of women and the importance of women in decision-making and leadership positions at all levels of the church.¹⁹

Great Women Leaders of History

By definition, leadership refers to leading or influencing a group of people or institutions through words, actions, or beliefs. This is one aspect of literature on leadership. There is no denying the fact that leaders are extremely important for achieving a set of goals or objectives. History is filled with great female leaders. Some of them including Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962), Indira Ghandi (1917-1984), and Ruth Bader Ginsberg (1933-2020). These women made positive change in their society through their abilities and principles. This reminds us that we do not all have to be Sarah Crosby or John Wesley to have our expectations challenged by the Holy Spirit! Think about your own life in the church, not only in ministry at this and other churches, but perhaps in seminary, on your job, as a layperson, a professor or as a child. We can all remember a time when a ministry and even life suddenly took a direction we had not anticipated. Can you remember a time when you had to step out and give of yourself – of your money, or your time, or your effort – in a way that you had not done before? I have many occurrences and they have strengthened my walk.

¹⁹ The United Methodist Church, “Why Does the UMC Ordain Women,” United Methodist Communications, August 08, 2019, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/ask-the-umc-why-does-the-umc-ordain-women>.

Patriarchal Systems

Many men and women will agree that when a ministry that was meant for one group accidentally expanded to another, or when something that started small and suddenly became big. We must always be very careful not to turn it into a story that glorifies a few people rather than glorifying God! Rising to the occasion, when we give of ourselves to others even when we have not planned to, is often the Christian way of life. The Spirit moves, and we follow despite the pushback. In spite of the roadblocks on the journey, we are constantly reminded that we will not be defeated.

I have conversed with women from all walks of life, who share the attitude of Maya Angelou toward defeat as expressed in her poem, "Still I Rise,"

Still I Rise: You may write me down in history. With your bitter, twisted lies, You may trod me in the very dirt. But still, like dust, I'll rise. Does my sassiness upset you? Why are you beset with gloom? 'Cause I walk like I've got oil wells Pumping in my living room. Just like moons and like suns, With the certainty of tides, Just like hopes springing high, Still I'll rise.

Did you want to see me broken? Bowed head and lowered eyes? Shoulders falling down like teardrops, Weakened by my soulful cries? Does my haughtiness offend you? Don't you take it awful hard 'Cause I laugh like I've got gold mines Diggin' in my own backyard. You may shoot me with your words, You may cut me with your eyes, You may kill me with your hatefulness, But still, like air, I'll rise.

Does my sexiness upset you? Does it come as a surprise? That I dance like I've got diamonds. At the meeting of my thighs? Out of the huts of history's shame. I rise. Up from a past that's rooted in pain. I rise. I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide, Welling and swelling I bear in the tide. Leaving behind nights of terror and fear. I rise. Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear. I rise. Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave, I am the dream and the hope of the slave. I rise. I rise. I rise.²⁰

²⁰ Maya Angelou, "Still I Rise," in *And Still I Rise: A Book of Poems* (New York, NY: Random House, 1968), 50-51.

Just as the slave masters use the Bible to justify slavery, many African American church goers, as well as male pastors, use the Bible to justify their patriarchal views and mistreatment of women who sit in pews. Pastors who are the most vocal about the systemic oppression of female in leadership are at times themselves equally oppressive of women.²¹ When confronted with such pastors, I offer them the following scenario that African American clergy in the South are faced with quite often: Imagine you are invited to a white Southern United Methodist church to preach, and the pastor met you at the door to greet you. Because you are a preacher, you expect to sit in the pulpit. Instead, the pastor leads you to the fellowship hall and tells you that you will be speaking from the podium on the floor. What do you do as an African American male preacher?

This describes the scenario of what happens to women preachers in many Baptist churches in the low country of South Carolina. Male African American preachers would scream racism, stage rallies, and call for civil rights organizations and attorneys to file discrimination lawsuits. Unlike male preachers, there are no avenues for preaching women to protest or resist such practice. The mantra of status quo leadership says, “we have always done it this way.” These men feel that if something is still working, it does not need to change. Oppressed people oppress other people and hold them back (and down) when it comes to South Carolina male pastors – who in the name of God, Christianity, the Church, and the Bible – maintain the status quo.

Another manner in which the patriarchal systems and practices show up in the church is through salaries. Too often, women are appointed to small struggling churches

²¹ Saneta Maiko, “John Wesley: Church Mission Struggle in The Fight against Slave Trade,” *Missionalia: Southern African Journal of Mission Studies* 45, no. 2 (2017): 144–53.

while men are blessed with what is considered high steeple churches. As you may gather, the salaries are much higher for men than women.

In this time, when many people from all walks of life find themselves feeling worn down from the turmoil they have faced throughout this year, may the late Ruth Bader Ginsburg's perseverance, dedication, courage, empathy, and integrity be a shining example of so many of the qualities we need to embody within ourselves and expectation of our leaders as we continue her fight for equality and justice for all people. Ruth Bader Ginsburg was the embodiment of a leader as she said, "Fight for the things that you care about, but do it in a way that will lead others to join you."²² Ginsburg encouraged real and enduring change that happens one step at a time.

Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg was a fearless champion of equality. Women from all walks of life fighting the good fight for justice are fortunate to have benefited personally and professionally from her work.

I implore you who read this; you who live this; and you who disapprove of this project to speak truth to power. In doing so, you will help to bring America closer to our lived experiences and to the equal justice promised in our Constitution.

Women trailblazers are everywhere: in the church and the office; in the athletic administration and the medical administration; in the board room and the court room; on Wall Street and Main Street; in your house and in the White House. If you are reading this project, my hope is that you too will stand against discrimination in all of its forms. When you fundamentally understand the gifts that people share daily and give freely – regardless of their sex or their gender orientation, their race or background – then hope

²² Jeffrey Toobin, "How Ruth Bader Ginsburg has moved the Court," *The New Yorker*, March 11, 2013.

becomes a reality as we share from pulpits Sunday after Sunday “who so ever will, let them come.” Women fight every day to make “equal justice for all” a reality and not just words etched on a wall because equal justice is the goal. As leaders, teachers, missionaries, and organizers, women have shaped the history of Methodism.

From the local church to the global church, women have led and served ministries within marginalized communities as well as initiated important social and political reform. United Women in Faith are driven by God’s love and united in sisterhood. We work to improve the lives of women, children, and youth. Every day, we show up. Every day, we take action. Every day, we get it done.

Yes, women in the pulpit stem back to the early 1800s, and despite the controversial debate surrounding the validity of female preachers, God has used women to make an indelible impact on the body of Christ and the world at large.

This rich women’s history includes:

[W]ord carriers such as Mary the mother of Jesus who was used to carry and bring forth the Word in the person of our Lord and Savior; evangelists such as Mary Magdalene, who on the heels of her tomb encountered the resurrected Jesus and runs to proclaim the Good News; traveling evangelists like Sarah Crosby, the first United Methodist woman license to preach in The United Methodist Church in 1761;;Jarena Lee, the first African-American woman authorized to preach in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in 1819; and church planters, like Sojourner Truth, who decreed prophecies as she declared in 1843, ‘the Spirit calls me, and I must go.’²³

But we women know how to make a way out of no way, to stretch the resources, to heal the brokenhearted all while keeping the House of God in good working order. The world

²³ Lyndia Grant, “Black Women Have Always Proven Their Mettle as Church Leaders: But Getting an Opportunity Hasn’t Always Been Easy,” *The Washington Informer*, April 26, 2022.

needs expressions of compassion, healing, loving relationships, understanding and nurturance. This is our specialty, and the time for the divine feminine to lead is now.

I would not trade my journey for anything, it has been riddled with ups and downs, disappointments, and joys; needless to say, my journey has been difficult at times, but God has called me to this journey and given me favor and the strength to keep climbing higher. With all of the advances and hurdles women have crossed, I know there is still much more Kingdom work for me to do, and I am encouraged to hang in there to see what the end will be. I will not be silent; I will always worship The Lord in Spirit and in Truth. Because, when I am in the pulpit, I want people to see the anointing of God and I want Women of Faith to experience God's grace and God's mercy upon me. Therefore, when I get up and preach in a pulpit, I ask for the anointing of God, because that is what destroys the yolks of doubt, depression, and disappointment. When I get nervous or anxious, I pray and ask God to show up in me and through me and I always pray God's anointing is upon me.

Conclusion

Women of Faith such as Sarah Crosby, Sojourner Truth, and so many others have shown us the way forward; now the fight is ours to continue. Therefore, I have no hesitation or regrets with this project. I petition everyone to stand up for justice for all people.

Stand up on soccer fields, on basketball courts, on tennis courts, in race cars, in boxing arenas, on the big screen, on the judge's bench, the law office, the doctor's office, in the church, in board room, in the classroom, and in the living room. God promises in

Words of encouragement from Exodus 14:14, “The Lord will fight for you.”²⁴ and Psalm 46:5, “God dwells in that city: it cannot be destroyed.”²⁵

So, I leave you with this from Sojourner Truth. Truth focused on her own survival and liberation, abolishing slavery, women’s enfranchisement and participation, and helping African Americans overcome difficulties arising immediately after emancipation.²⁶ Women are often frown upon for stepping up, yet women continue to do great things in an effort to advance and give hope to so many people from all genres, races, and all walks of life; they end up giving nuggets to others. Women give other women the nuggets of sisterhood, the nuggets of gathering together, and the nuggets of the worth of prayer. Women of Faith can utilize those auxiliaries that are already afforded to them through businesses and churches. These areas can be used to support each other, cheer one another on, and talk with and for one another. Understand that every denomination does not have a United Women in Faith auxiliary, but it is important to understand and know that you do not have to be a member of the United Methodist denomination to join a Church’s United Women in Faith circle. My hope is that through this research project that other denominations will seek ways much like the United Methodist Church to be more supportive to women who seek to lead. These businesses and churches can seek ways to show love and give love to others. Women will continue to keep the faith, because women know the struggles of being a woman in a man’s world.

²⁴ Exodus 14:14.

²⁵ Psalm 46:5.

²⁶ Rosetta E. Ross, *Witnessing and Testifying: Black Women, Religion, and Civil Rights* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2003), 4.

The most obvious reason for this project concerning women preachers of early Methodism is that women were there. There is no doubt that women helped to make the Methodist Revival of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries a powerful religious movement of significance. Women preachers exerted an influence which was practical and theological. The fact that John Wesley and other early Methodist leaders sanctioned and encouraged women to preach under their supervision was monumental. Even though the role and influence of women preachers of early Methodism have never been fully documented and their religious contributions made to the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries revival never fully appreciated, the fact remains clear that women were there. It is clear to see that there was sexism in early history as it is clear to witness sexism today. Women were made to be invisible. It is difficult for me to read and study history only to learn that historians neglected to recognize the influences of women, thus leaving women powerless and seemingly appearing unimportant.

Be encouraged sisters knowing that God condemns favoritism. James 2:11 teaches us, “My brothers and sisters, do not show favoritism as you hold on to the faith in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ.”²⁷ Favoritism, according to *Merriam-Webster*, is “the showing of special favor: partiality; the state or fact of being a favorite.”²⁸ In other words, favoritism is the unfair practice of treating some people better than others. Let us be clear, favoritism is inconsistent with God’s character. Witnesses such as Deuteronomy 10:17, Ephesians 6:9, Romans 2:11, as well as Acts 10:34 bear witness that showing

²⁷ James 2:11.

²⁸ Merriam-Webster.com. s.v. “favoritism,” *Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, [https:// www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/favoritism](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/favoritism).

favoritism is inconsistent with God's character, and is antithetical to the gospel, which James reminds us is incompatible with "faith in our glorious Jesus Christ."

Be reminded that support begins with the nuggets that God has already afforded us through employment offices, usher boards, choirs, board rooms, and family gatherings. Use those times to share your story with others. I would encourage prayer groups, sister circles, outings, family day, date night, and truthful sharing.

If you are a woman and feel called by God to ordained ministry, but your denomination will not allow you to utilize the gifts and graces given freely by God, then hear me and hear me will, it is time to move. Start by visiting the United Methodist Church and check out the General Board of Higher Education and Ministry's "GBHEM" website. Every calling is unique. The GBHEM is there to help you discern God's path for you and provide you with the resources you need for your journey. If your church will not receive your gifts and graces, then it is time to move to a different drumbeat.

Listen closely distracter, this is not a push towards the United Methodist Church. This is a push towards freedom! freedom to share Jesus! Freedom to walk in the Glory of The Lord!

CHAPTER FOUR

THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

This doctoral final project addresses the challenges and experiences that women in leadership positions face and have faced throughout history — both within the religious spectrum as well as externally. New Webster United Methodist Church (NWUMC) serves as my project’s context because within the present leadership structure, we find women of all ages that are no strangers to gender discrimination practices. It is imperative that we not gloss over the fact that women in leadership face gender discrimination. Today, the advancement of women in ministry is constantly plague by such biasness’s regardless of their fields of leadership. Even though, women have assumed prominent roles in challenging the stereotypic gender-biases of patriarchal models of leadership, they are still statistically under-represented.

As I research the platform of gender equality, it is evident that such is a fundamental human right which no one should have to fight for. I find it crucial to address such biases that constantly infringe upon women in ministry and leadership roles in the 21st century. Women face these challenges in pastoral ministry, while being subject to, but not limited to, pay discrimination and sexism. This gives birth to self-esteem issues and family separation. From personal experiences, I am a witness to the

numerous instances of women who are minorities and are identified with disadvantaged groups.

I am passionate about giving notice to the oppressive acts to which women in leadership face, as well as undergirding it with an unapologetic desire to raise an awareness to said generational and cultural norms stemming from patriarchal systems and practices, be it sacred or secular. My research project is entitled, “Developing a Leadership Model for Women: Acknowledging, Identifying, and Addressing Gender Biases.” The context of this project is the New Webster United Methodist Church of Wadmalaw, South Carolina. The problem is that New Websters United Methodist Church has a history of discriminating against female ministry leaders and/or women in general. The hypothesis is if ministry leaders participate in a six-week training about gender bias and discrimination in ministry, then they will be equipped to advocate for gender equality in Christian ministry. The methodology that will be used to evaluate this will be mixed methods that include daily use of a concept map, pre- and post-questionnaires, Bible devotion, and journaling. The goal is for women to undergo life and faith change that lifts women leaders in New Webster to move from brokenness to wholeness with a better understanding of what/how stereotypes operate and a heightened ability to identify and address bias thinking in themselves as well as in others.

Main Body

The United Methodist Church is a global denomination that opens hearts, opens minds, and opens doors through active engagement within our world. The mission of The

United Methodist Church is to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.¹

When we exam the biblical teachings at New Webster United Methodist Church, we find that the denomination teach that the Bible is God's Word. Thus, we believe the Scriptures are true, authoritative, and sufficient (Ps 19:7-11; 2 Tm 3:16; and 2 Pet 1:20-21). Therefore, scriptural holiness entails more than personal piety; love of God is always linked with love of neighbor, a passion for justice, and renewal in life of the world.² "We, affirm women and men to be equal in every aspect of their common life. We therefore urge that every effort be made to eliminate sex-role of stereotypes in activity and portrayal of family life and in all aspects of voluntary and compensatory participation in Church and society."³ United Methodist affirm with Scripture the common humanity of male and female, both having equal worth in the eyes of God.

It is important to know that in general, feminism and women's rights can be seen as a movement to put an end to sexism, sexist exploitation, and oppression. In addition, we seek to achieve full gender equality legally and socially. My task of this project is to raise an awareness of gender discrimination of women in leadership. I will seek to undergird this task by providing research that will support my hypothesis that will confirm how gender biases create barriers as well as promoting biasness and inequality

¹ The United Methodist Church, "Who are the United Methodist," <https://www.umc.org/en/rethink-church/>.

² The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 53.

³ The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 122.

among women in ministry. These challenges have birthed self-esteem issues, aloneness, and income differences.

My project will seek to prove that there is no shortage of qualified women to fill leadership roles in the local church and community. According to Catalyst US Labor Force research, “women have earned more bachelor’s degrees than men since 1982, more master’s degrees than men since 1987 and more doctorate degrees than men since 2006.”⁴ Yet we still find that from corporate boardrooms to Congress, from health-care companies to the courts, from non-profit organizations to universities, from the pulpit to the White House, men are far more likely than women to rise to the highest paying and most prestigious positions in leadership. Even with decades of investment in women’s leadership programs offered on jobs, churches, and social organizations, still, we see and witness progress in advancing women continues to decline.⁵ My hope is that this project moves one woman, if not all women, forward toward standing up for change.

As a lifelong United Methodist, I am encouraged by and embrace teachings of Methodism. It is empowering to know and teach that John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist movement, taught that we pursue our faith in community and action with others. We practice a social holiness which refers to the love of God rooted in the heart of every believer and overflowing in ever widening circles — from small groups, through the community of faith and out into the world.⁶ As United Methodist, we insist that

⁴ Women in the workforce, *United States: Quick Take*, 2022, <https://www.catalyst.org/research/women-in-the-workforce-united-states>.

⁵ The American Association of University Women, *Barriers and Bias: The Status of Women in Leadership* (Washington, DC: AAUW, 2016), ix, www.aauw.org/app/uploads/2020.

⁶ The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church*, (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 53-54.

personal salvation always involves Christian mission and service to the world. The United Methodist Church has a long history of action and advocacy for social justice.

New Webster along with United Methodists worldwide are active in our communities and in the world through a variety of ways, including:

- Participating in local mission projects and service initiatives
- Supporting global mission efforts through the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and other mission organizations
- Advocating for social justice and working to address issues such as poverty, hunger, and inequality
- Providing educational and vocational training opportunities
- Offering counseling, support groups, and other forms of pastoral care
- Creating and supporting community development programs⁷

At New Webster's circle meeting on March 11, 2021, I shared a video, "Reflections of our Faith," from Reverend Susan Henry-Crowe of the United Methodist Board of Church and Society to address questions about the meaning of "social holiness." In the video Reverend Henry-Crowe stated that, "Social holiness is unique to Methodism."⁸ She further shared in that video that, "United Methodists have a long commitment to social holiness. It is in our DNA. It is part of who we are. She went on to say, Wesley has said, 'There is no religion that is not social, no holiness that is not social' and that without social holiness, we cannot exist."⁹

⁷ The United Methodist Church, "What do United Methodist do," <https://www.umc.org/en/rethink-church/>.

⁸ ResourceUMC, "Reflections on our Faith," United Methodist Communications, September 7, 2017, <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/agencies/communications>.

⁹ ResourceUMC, "Reflections on our Faith," United Methodist Communications, September 7, 2017, <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/agencies/communications>.

Through this doctoral project, I strive to give voice to the suffrage of countless women in leadership positions. This project further gives voice to my belief that because of God's love for us and Christ's love that is within us, we are called to reach out into the world to walk with others and to accompany them in their journeys. Social holiness is unique to United Methodists, and it reminds us that we must be in this together. When one person is oppressed, all of us are oppressed; when one race is discriminated upon, all races are discriminated upon because we live our lives together and we live our lives with all of God's creation. We walk with one another. We walk with those who are poor, those who are vulnerable, and those who live on the margins of life. Giving a voice to gender discrimination is a real reminder of the gift that God has given me as a black clergy, who is a Methodist and who is a catalyst for church renewal. One thing that I gained from being the South Carolina Coordinator for Black Methodists for Church Renewal is that we, the black voice even in this Anglican Church, must always remember, "Our Time Under God is Now."¹⁰ Therefore, I am committed to social holiness and to be with women of color in leadership, women in leadership, and any group of people being oppressed or discriminated against on this journey as we live our lives together.

The story of Deborah in the Old Testament is truly remarkable as it is from a time when women were thoroughly invisible, voiceless, and dependent. Yet, The Book of Judges tells of Deborah's visibility, competency character, and leadership. The Bible says that Deborah was prophetic, a wife at the time of her leadership (Judges 4:4), a judge in a public location (under the palm tree), and she was competent as people (male and female) would seek her wisdom to solve their civic and legal disputes. Her character is seen

¹⁰ Black Methodist For Church Renewal, "Our Time Under God is Now," <https://www.bmcru.org>.

during a pivotal point in the history of Israel. Deborah sought to enlist the support of Barak to lead the nation in defense of an approaching army. We see that Barak was reluctant to lead the nation, and only after Deborah agreed to assume the primary leadership role did Barak agree to assist. Barak's dependence upon Deborah proves her ability to lead. It is thrilling to see how this female was a warrior-leader, a judge, and a companion in battle.

Social Holiness

The theological foundation of my doctoral project is "social holiness." Social holiness is the practice of obeying Jesus' commandments to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind, loving your neighbor as yourself, and loving one another one another (fellow members of your local congregation) as Christ loves.¹¹ It is my goal to show how the concept of Social Holiness and the Story of Deborah in Judges chapter 4 teaches and provides insight into individuals and communities in a manner which promotes justice, equality, and righteousness. We see that Deborah is deemed a prophetess, a judge, and a wife who holds a position of leadership and authority in ancient Israel. We find that Deborah leads the Israelites with wisdom, courage, and divine guidance which empowers them to overcome oppression and achieve victory over their enemies. The Wesleyan tradition teaches that social holiness empowers marginalized individuals and communities to participate fully in society and thus address social injustices.¹² I

¹¹Steve Manskar, "No Holiness but Social Holiness," United Methodist Church Discipleship Ministries, November 16, 2015, <https://www.umdscioleship.org/blog/no-holiness-but-social-holiness>.

¹² The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of the United Methodist Church* (Nashville, TN: United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 53-54. ¶.

wholeheartedly believe that social holiness calls for the recognition of leadership and shares contributions of society, regardless of gender or social status.

This chapter seeks to give voice to women who aspire to lead by exploring the theology of social holiness and its means to putting faith into action. Additionally, throughout this chapter I have emphasized the need to bring awareness to gender bias through social holiness. When we are empowered to raise our voices, we are liberated and transformed. It is impossible to see the value and importance of social holiness without first defining theology and its implication for Christians, specifically Black women. Theology is the ways in which people, formally and informally, talk about God. Consider the following formal definition of theology:

A methodical investigation and interpretation of the content of Christian faith, the orderly clarification and explanation of what the Christian message affirms. From another angle, theology is an activity or function of the Christian church carried out by members of the church. It is faith seeking understanding, through which the church in every age reflects on the basis of its existence and the content of its message.¹³

Theology is also defined as a “reflection on Christian life amid struggles for freedom or liberation, for the full humanity of all persons, and for the transformation of human persons and societies as manifestations of and in expectation of the reign of God.”¹⁴ Therefore, theology fosters a conversation that focuses on who God is and how God interacts with humanity. One’s theological beliefs undergird one’s conviction, speech, actions, and position on matters involving God, Christ, humanity, and scriptures.

¹³ Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 3rd ed. (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 2002), 1.

¹⁴ Thomas and Wondra, *Introduction to Theology*, 1.

United Methodists believe in the importance of putting faith into action through practical expressions of love and service in the world. Social holiness involves engaging in acts of mercy, advocacy for justice, and efforts to address systemic injustices that perpetuates inequality and oppression.

A closer study of Deborah's leadership will concur that Deborah is instrumental in delivering and protecting the Israelites from oppression and injustice. My studies further coincide with the understanding that Deborah played a central role in orchestrating the defeat of the Canaanite oppressors. Her role helped to bring in a time of peace and prosperity for the Israelites. Wesleyan tradition has taught me that social holiness advocates for the pursuit of justice and liberation for all who are affected by oppression and discrimination. This research project is a clarion call to others to work together to combat and challenge systemic injustices and create a society where all people can experience freedom and dignity.

Through concept mapping and questioning within this research project, I seek to develop a model that will pursue community engagement, identify triggers, track attitudes, and provide visual data as to how society and the church are connected in gender discrimination. I will further seek to parrot Deborah's leadership skills of mobilizing and organizing. Her strategies were instrumental in helping the Israelite community confront their oppressors and defend their rights. Social holiness, as I have grown to know, stresses the importance of community engagement and collective action in addressing social issues and promoting positive change. Social holiness encourages individuals and communities to work together in solidarity to address injustices and build a more just and equitable society.

Deborah, attributes her wisdom, insight, and strength to the divine guidance of God, who empowers her to fulfill her role as a judge and leader. Her leadership is characterized by her reliance on divine guidance and providence. Thus, my understanding of Social holiness reminds me that divine guidance may not always be invoked but spiritual and moral discernment is vitally important when addressing social issues. Therefore, the need for prayer is a vital part of the development of this doctoral project's research because Social holiness calls upon individuals and communities to act with compassion, integrity, and justice, guided by religious or moral convictions. Moon stated in his book that, "Prayer is the test of everything; prayer is the source of everything; prayer is the driving force of everything; prayer is also the director of everything. If prayer is right, everything is right. For prayer will not allow anything to go wrong."¹⁵

As outlined in Scripture and in accordance with the United Methodist Statement of Faith, we believe that men and women are equal in essence, dignity, and value, and are complementary by divine design. Gender does not merely represent a social construct but, instead, represents a reality present in every human from birth. Men and women are not interchangeable.¹⁶ In the first book of the Bible, Genesis, we find that God, in God's wisdom and providence, created two complementary sexes for our good and His glory. Considering God's good, created order, and the fact that men and women both share in divine image of God, God intends for men and women to have different yet complementary roles and responsibilities in the church, in the workplace, and in the

¹⁵ Gary W. Moon and David G. Benner, *Spiritual Direction and the Care of Souls: A Guide to Christian Approaches and Practices* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 29.

¹⁶ Umc.org, "What We Believe," <https://www.umc.org>.

home. We should further recognize the roles as God's grace to men and women, protecting, preserving, and practicing them for God's glory, our joy, and for the sake of human flourishing.

United Methodists share with other Christians the conviction that Scripture is the primary source and criterion for Christian doctrine. Through Scripture, the living Christ meets us in the experience of redeeming grace. We are convinced that Jesus Christ is the living Word of God, whom we trust in life and in death. "The biblical authors, illumined by the Holy Spirit, bear witness that in Christ the world is reconciled to God. The Bible bears authentic testimony to God's self-disclosure in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ as well as in God's work of creation, in the pilgrimage of Israel, and in the Holy Spirit's ongoing activity in human history."¹⁷

The close relationship of tradition, experience, and reason appears in the Bible itself. Scripture witnesses to a variety of diverse traditions, some of which reflect tensions in interpretation within the early Judeo-Christian heritage. However, these traditions are woven together in the Bible in a manner that expresses the fundamental unity of God's revelation as received and experienced by people in the diversity of their own lives.¹⁸ As we open our minds and hearts to the Word of God through the words of human beings inspired by the Holy Spirit, faith is born and nourished, our understanding is deepened, and the possibilities for transforming the world become apparent to us.

¹⁷ The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2016 ¶ (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 83.

¹⁸ The United Methodist Church, *The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church*, 2016." (Nashville, TN: The United Methodist Publishing House, 2016), 84.

Therefore, New Webster United Methodist Church leaders and members start with the understanding that the Bible is God's Word. We believe the Scriptures are true, authoritative, and sufficient" (Ps 19:7-11; 2 Tm 3:16; and 2 Pet 1:20-21). Therefore, we believe that any attempt to understand personhood and gender must begin with divine revelation. The Bible teaches that God created two complementary sexes of humans, male and female, to bear His image together (Gn 1:27-28; Mt 19:4; and Mark 10:6). This distinction in gender represents an essential characteristic of personhood and reflects an essential part of being created in God's image. Considering God's goodness, created order, and the fact that men and women both share in divine image bearing, God intends for men and women to have different yet complementary roles and responsibilities in the church and home.

Addressing gender bias within theological contexts requires critical engagement as well as a commitment to promoting gender equality, justice, and inclusion within religious traditions. It involves reexamining traditional theological assumptions and interpretations through a lens of gender justice and affirming the inherent dignity and worth of all individuals, regardless of gender. Yet, most simply, people gauge their theology in two forms, ethics and morals, without any critical engagement or any commitment to create gender equality. When we simply relate ethics and morals to "right" and "wrong" conduct, we then use them interchangeably, not admitting that ethics and morals are different. Oxford Learning College gives a clear description of ethics versus morals; ethics refer to rules provided by an external source, such as codes of conduct in workplaces or principles in religions and morals refer to an individual's own principles regarding right and wrong. Ethics comes from the social system which is

external, and morals comes from the individual which is internal. As with anything in life, there are blurred lines when seeking to understand because a person strictly following ethical principles may not have any morals at all. Likewise, one could violate ethical principles within a given system of rules to maintain moral integrity and continue to believe they are spiritual. Needless to say, a moral person believes they are bound by a higher covenant and often follows a code of ethics as it would apply to a system. Ethics are governed by professional and legal guidelines within a particular time and place while morality transcends cultural norm.¹⁹

Patriarchy through moral and ethical principles dominates both religious and secular spheres and has a direct impact on whether women not only survive but flourish in the pulpit, the pew, and in public spaces. If women do not tell their own stories, who will tell them? If women's voices are silenced, who will speak for them? How will women leaders speak up for themselves if they are to remain silent in their positions? Deborah's story in Judges 4:4-16 and the concept of social holiness highlight the importance of leadership, empowerment, justice, and community engagement in promoting righteousness and addressing social injustices. Both, the story of Deborah and social holiness offer complementary perspectives on the role of individuals and communities in working towards a more just society. I would submit that the story of Deborah embraces the notion that the Lord calls ordinary people to do extraordinary things, which reiterates that the depth of a person's love for God is shown by how they love others. This idea of Social Holiness involves loving others, caring for the poor,

¹⁹ Oxford College, "Ethics Versus Morals – What's the Difference?" <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/ethics>.

addressing systemic issues, and believing that Christianity should involve others and not be in isolation. However, it is visibly noticeable that the church has been very slow to embrace the New Testament ideal of equality and mutuality among people regardless of race and gender (Gal 3:28).²⁰

The intersection of womanist theology and liberation theology strengthens the understanding of how to create a model for leadership principles for women to acknowledge, identify and address gender bias, as they offer critical reflections on gender, power, and justice within religious traditions. It also explores how feminist perspectives can inform theological understandings of social holiness and challenge gender bias within religious communities. Monica Coleman notes that, “Womanist theologies maintain an unflinching commitment to reflect on the social, cultural, and religious experiences of black women. Womanist theologies are ultimately grounded in and accountable to the religious reality of black women’s lives.”²¹ She further states that,

as a form of liberation theology, womanist theologies aim for the freedom of oppressed peoples and creatures. More specifically, womanist theologies add the goals of survival, quality of life, and wholeness to black theology’s goals of liberation and justice. Womanist theologians analyze the oppressive aspects of society that prevent black women from having the quality of life and wholeness that God desires for them and for all of creation.²²

The story of Deborah’s leadership sheds light on how 21st Century understanding of social holiness recognizes the intersectionality of social identities and experiences,

²⁰ This is a paraphrase of Galatians 3:38.

²¹ Monica A. Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way: Womanist Theologians on Salvation* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2008), 11.

²² Coleman, *Making a Way Out of No Way*, 11.

including gender.²³ Josh Broward and Thomas Oord also acknowledge that individuals experience gender bias differently based on factors such as race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and ability. A 21st Century understanding of social holiness stresses the importance of inclusive language in a broader society. Josh Broward and Thomas Jay Oord explored further a 21st Century understanding of social holiness in their book, *Renovating Holiness*, of some demonstrations of holiness that they believe have been forgotten and that we must force ourselves to reconsider. These considerations are not new but are easily overlooked if we focus primarily on a theological discussion. “These aspect include social justice, stewardship, and courtesy in an effort to zoom in on practical elements that are just as important as the syntax and pontifications of the doctrine itself.”²⁴

Jeremiah 22:3, reads, “This is what the Lord says: Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed. Do no wrong or violence to the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow, and do not shed innocent blood in this place.”²⁵ Which lets me know that God requires that His people be fair in how they interact with each other.

My project research is designed to encourage others by developing a model for women to actively advocate for the use of inclusive language and imagery, to move away from exclusive language, and to build self-esteem. When a culture’s vocation changes, it tends to generate a shift aimed towards broadening biblical understanding as it challenges

²³ Josh Broward and Thomas Jay Oord, eds., *Renovating Holiness* (Nampa, ID, Elevate Faith, Boise, ID: Sacra Sage Press, 2015), 342.

²⁴ Broward and Oord, eds., *Renovating Holiness*, 343.

²⁵ Jeremiah 22:3, NIV.

traditional gender roles. Moreover, this project will also seek to emphasize and empower women within religious communities through a multifaceted approach combining individual empowerment strategies with broader societal and systemic interventions such as: providing education and raising awareness, forge partnerships with communities and organizations, offer skill building workshops and design empowerment programs to enhance confidence, networking and peer support, offer leadership training/development, and empower woman to become advocates and activist for change.

My hope is that one woman will stand up or “woman up” and call for or demand their equal opportunities in leadership roles. Such an awakening will challenge historical exclusion dating back to Deborah. It will also lend itself to promoting a more inclusive understanding of religious authority today. Finally, this project will seek to examine how gender social structures contribute to the under representation of women in leadership positions as well as explore how societal expectations and norms affect or influence women’s access to and rise to advancement in leadership roles. Through our JIP Sister’s Devotion, I have witnessed strategies to build self-esteem, work by creating meaningful change in the lives of women and thus contributing to broader efforts towards gender equality and social justice.

Further research into the role of social holiness today promotes a culture of consent and interactions. It recognizes that gender bias often manifests in situations where individuals’ autonomy and bodily integrity are violated. Social holiness in the 21st Century addressing gender bias involves promoting affirmative consent, respect for boundaries, and the rights for individuals to make decisions about their bodies with freedom from coercion or pressure. Too often, women, are abused and oppressed by lived

experiences and practices of faith communities that act as contributors in perpetuating gender bias within religious contexts. Liken to the story of Deborah, countless women identify with the concrete realities of religious life and seek to promote transformative actions grounded in theological insights. Churches, businesses, and even religious universities provide pastoral care and counseling sensitive to the experiences of individuals affected by gender biases. Their ultimate goal is to offer support and guidance to those who have experienced discrimination or marginalization within secular and sacred communities. As well as advocating for inclusive and affirming practices, sacred communities generally work with other faith communities to develop worship services and rituals that reflect gender-inclusive language, imagery, and practices. This is manifested in the work Church of Our Savior (Seabrook, South Carolina), United Methodist Discipleship Ministries (Nashville, Tennessee), United Women in Faith, African American Clergy Women, Black Methodists for Church Renewal and The Johns Island Parish (Johns Island, SC). The United Methodist Church continues to introduce and develop educational programs and curriculum materials that address issues of gender bias within religious education settings, sexual ethics trainings, safe sanctuary policies, and integrity workshops).

I believe this project will empower marginalized voices by amplifying the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals within religious communities, including women and others affected by gender bias by creating platforms for storytelling and testimony, as well as advocating for greater representation and leadership opportunities for marginalized groups within faith communities. Overall, sound biblical understanding is vital when addressing gender bias within religious contexts to promote transformative

action which foster inclusive practices to advocate for gender equality and justice grounded in theological insights and principles.

Historical texts, documents, letters, and diaries provide firsthand accounts of gender bias and discrimination throughout history. This is seen in women's suffrage literature, such as the speeches and writings of suffragists like Sojourner Truth, Susan B. Anthony, Fannie Lou Hamer, Mary Ann Shadd Cary, and Mary McLeod Bethune. All these suffragists' work documents the struggle for women's right to vote, be educated, and so much more. Works such as "The Feminine Mystique" by Betty Friedan (1963) and "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman" by Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) highlights the historical roots of gender inequality and the efforts to address it. Also, history-maker Reverend Dr. Jacquelyn Grant – from my Alma Mater -ITC –continues to be a voice geared towards change. Artistic and cultural representations, including literature, art, music, and film, reflect societal attitudes towards gender and provide insights into the experiences of women and marginalized genders. Analyzing historical works of art and cultural artifacts can shed light on the pervasive nature of gender bias and the resistance to it such as Aretha Franklin's song "Respect" and Beyonce's song Lemonade.

Historical resources advocate for addressing gender bias and demonstrate the persistence of gender discrimination throughout history and the ongoing efforts to challenge and overcome it. These resources provide valuable validation for contemporary efforts to promote gender equality and justice. While the United Methodist Church has a rich theological tradition and a commitment to social justice that informs its approach to addressing gender bias, it is troubling that we (the UMC) do not have a single doctrinal statement specifically on gender bias. However, the UMC's theological principles and

social teachings provide guidance for addressing issues of gender equality and justice. Our Social Principles include statements on human rights, equality, and justice. These principles affirm the rights of women and advocate for gender equality in all aspects of society which calls on United Methodists to work toward eliminating discrimination based on gender and to promote equal opportunities for women in all areas of life. The Wesleyan tradition's emphasis on social holiness provides a theological basis for addressing gender bias and promoting gender equality. Lastly, the United Methodist Church is committed to inclusivity and diversity by welcoming people of all backgrounds and identities into its congregations and ministries.

Conclusion

The day of June 24th, 2022, is a day that will be etched in future generations' textbooks as a historic day as the Supreme Court of the United States of America revoked the constitutional right to seek safe abortion care by overturning *Roe v Wade* that allowed for women (and doctors) to undergo an abortion.

This decision disproportionately effects the reproductive lives of women residing in America. Given the systemic impacts of racism and white supremacy, it is the Black, racialized, and poor women who suffer terrible repercussions such as inadequate healthcare, unsafe surgeries, and loss wages due to illness. Addressing gender bias is foundational in achieving gender equality because biases, whether explicit or implicit, shape attitudes, behaviors, policies, and practices that perpetuate inequality between genders.

I am a witness to how gender biases influence how individuals perceive and evaluate others. Biased attitudes lead to stereotypes, prejudices, and discrimination against individuals based on their gender identity or expression. By challenging and addressing bias, society can promote more inclusive and equitable attitudes towards all genders. Left unchecked, gender bias contributes to dictating how individuals should behave, dress, and pursue life opportunities based on their gender. For example, I have been told that wearing my locs will cause me to be overlooked for certain appointments and speaking engagements because my locs are too ethnic — whatever that means. By challenging biased beliefs and norms, society can create space for greater gender diversity and the acceptance of a broader range of identities and expressions. Addressing bias is essential for creating equitable systems that provide equal opportunities for all genders. Jaquelyn Grant says it best in her workbook *The Black Studies Reader*. Her work entitled “Black Theology and the Black Woman,” states that,

If the liberation of women is not proclaimed, the church’s proclamation cannot be about divine liberation. If the church does not share in the liberation struggle of Black women, its liberation struggle is not authentic. If women are oppressed, the church cannot possibly be ‘a visible manifestation that the gospel is a reality’ — for the gospel cannot be real in that context. One can see the contradictions between the church’s language or proclamation of liberation and its action by looking both at the status of Black women in the church as laity and Black women in the ordained ministry of the church.²⁶

This doctoral project is a testament to bringing about awareness to generations because I witnessed the double standards of women and men during the 2022 Southeastern Jurisdictional Conference of The United Methodist Church as a fellow South Carolinian female clergy was elected as bishop. While that election was historic

²⁶ Jacquelyn Grant, *The Black Studies Reader*, 1st, EReader, Routledge 2004, 325, <https://philpapers.org/rec/BARISB-2>.

and powerful, the South Carolina Conference did not extend the usual celebratory gathering for the female clergy. Complaints of how the election was done and all kinds of other derogatory statements were whispered about the female from South Carolina. What should have been wonderous for South Carolina was instead made ugly. You see, she won the election as a write-in on the ballot. Instances like this further verify that gender biases undermine the effectiveness and legitimacy of institutions and organizations by perpetuating inequality, limiting diverse perspectives, and hindering innovation. Addressing bias fosters a more inclusive and diverse environment that values the contributions of all individuals leading to stronger and more resilient institutions. By addressing biases and promoting gender equality, societies can harness the full potential of all genders to drive positive change and innovation. Addressing gender biases challenges harmful attitudes, practices, and systems that perpetuate inequality and discrimination based on gender.

I am determined to continue to raise awareness of gender discrimination of women in church leadership, and I am empowered by Angela Tilby's book review which is a tribute to one of the founders of womanist theology, Katie Cannon. Tilby states that Cannon's

theological endeavor was to show that 'Black women's moral discourse deserves a place in the Western moral canon.' Taking the term 'Womanist' from Alice Walker, she began to deconstruct the texts, practices and assumptions that continue to mar Black women's progress in academic life. The call to learn and teach is a call to be involved in the recovery of wounded memories, to work relentlessly to counter injustices and to nurture the hope for the transformation of society.²⁷

²⁷ Angela Tilby, "Emilie M. Townes, Stacey Floyd-Thomas, Alison P. Gise Johnson and Angela Sims, eds, *Walking through the Valley: Womanist Explorations in the Spirit of Katie Geneva Cannon*," *Theology* 126, no. 4 (2023): 316-317, <https://doi-org.dtl.edm.oclc.org/10.1177/0040571X231182872y>.

In conclusion, I remind readers that in the 21st Century, women around the world continue to fight against gender discrimination and work towards gender equality. The #Me Too Movement founded by Tarana Burke is a global movement against sexual harassment and assault. The #Me Too Movement empowers survivors to share their stories, hold perpetrators accountable, and advocate for systemic change to end gender violence and gender discrimination. In her book *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics*, Melanie Harris shares excerpts from Alice Walker's iconic fictional stage play, *The Color Purple*, as a means of storytelling. While the stage play is fictional, Harris states that Alice Walker argues that there is a purpose for uncovering black women's stories. In the book Walker argues that "the purpose is to provide black people with a sense of empowerment and to stress the importance of black women's insights as valued knowledge and wisdom within the wider discourse of literature."²⁸ I would argue for the sake of this work that much like Alice Walker, "black women's stories should be emphasized because they are a way of showing that black women are also fully human and black women's stories and experiences should be treated equally important in the larger discourse of literature and history."²⁹

I believe that developing this model for leadership principles for women that acknowledges, identifies, and addresses gender bias is an ambitious and impactful doctoral project that will ultimately empower women leaders to thrive in their roles and thus advance gender equality in organizational settings. Therefore, I am reminded of our class discussion on March 20, 2024, led by Dr. Lillian Smith, as she shared from the

²⁸ Melanie L. Harris, *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics*, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 142.

²⁹ Harris, *Gifts of Virtue, Alice Walker, and Womanist Ethics*, 142.

book, *I'm Black, I'm Christian, I'm Methodist*, that, “we must remember who we are, wherever we are called to serve. Remembering that we have God’s power to do this work. That in doing the work of the Lord, prayer is vital. We use pray to dismantle the spiritual hindrances that keeps evangelism from taking place and those hindrances that block growth.”³⁰ Look out world, here we come! Praying by Faith — we will not be silenced! Because when we, Black women, understand that when we cannot eliminate suffering, we often try to give it a positive value. But what if that winds up rationalizing injustice? What if glorified suffering only legitimizes oppression? What if “meaningful” suffering is the last thing marginalized communities need? Womanist theologian Delores Williams raises these questions with respect to her own Christian tradition in the following excerpt from *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk*.

There is nothing divine in the blood of the cross. As Christians, Black women cannot forget the cross, but neither can they glorify it. To do so is to glorify suffering and to render their exploitation sacred. To do so is to glorify the sin of defilement. Women must question [this] way of seeing such positive value in oppressed Black women identifying with Christ through their common suffering wrought by cross-bearing. Black women should never be encouraged to believe that they can be united with God through this kind of suffering. There are quite enough Black women bearing the cross by rearing children alone, struggling on welfare, suffering through poverty, experiencing inadequate health care, domestic violence and various forms of sexism and racism.³¹

In *Sisters in the Wilderness*, Delores Williams reiterates the need for women to speak out on gender bias by uplifting suppressed voices, challenging patriarchal narratives, and

³⁰ Lillian Smith, “Rooted: Anchored for Catalyzing Change,” Class Discussion on *I’m Black, I’m Christian, I’m Methodist*, Johns Island, South Carolina, March 20, 2024.

³¹ Delores S. Williams, *Sisters in the Wilderness: The Challenge of Womanist God-Talk* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2013), 98-99.

offering a theology rooted in survival and justice. I remind you, the reader, that this project is a call to action for women to reclaim their narratives and demand change. My doctoral project further suggests that it is important for The Johns Island Parish churches and communities to consistently reassess our values.

CHAPTER FIVE

INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS

Introduction

The theme of this Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter is to show forth the effects of society and the role it plays in gender biases in New Webster United Methodist Church in Wadmalaw, South Carolina. Therefore, I have entitled this chapter, the impact and influences of societal abnormalities that lends itself to gender biases. This chapter will proceed by defining sociology, addressing communal factors, exploring traditional influences, and reviewing generational dynamics of sociology against the backdrop of exploring the concept of conflict theory as espoused by Karl Marx. It is my desire to analyze these movements for models that spur radical movements to confront systemic injustices in religious spaces, particularly roles of leadership in Black Methodist churches.

My lifetime has been one where the pews and people within the United Methodist churches where I have served and worshiped, including those of New Webster United Methodist Church, in Wadmalaw, South Carolina, are but a snapshot of yester year's patriarchal promotions, prejudices, platforms and precondition practices. The modern-day songwriter Marvin Sapp says in his song, "I Believe," that the devil is mad at you for the mere sake that he has peeped into your future, and he sees what God is about to do for

you which speaks of the bestowing of favor and blessings.¹ If these patriarchal promotions, prejudices, platforms, and precondition practices are not confronted and addressed, then peeping into the future of the New Webster United Methodist Church does not look good. And what an indicting legacy we/I will leave for those women coming up behind us. However, it is my passionate desire that having raised an awareness to this prevailing problem, that at the conclusion of my project, it will lead to change allowing the people of the New Webster United Methodist Church to have a much brighter future than what it is now. The problem to be investigated is that New Websters United Methodist Church has a history of discriminating against female ministry leaders and/or women in general. The hypothesis is if ministry leaders participate in a six-week training about gender bias and discrimination in ministry, then they will be equipped to advocate for gender equality in Christian ministry. The methodology that will be used to evaluate this will be mixed methods that include daily use of a concept map, pre- and post-questionnaires, Bible devotion, and journaling. The goal is for women to undergo life and faith change that lifts women leaders in New Webster to move from brokenness to wholeness with a better understanding of what/how stereotypes operate and a heightened ability to identify and address bias thinking in themselves as well as in others.

Sociology

This Interdisciplinary Foundations research undergirds the discipline of sociology to answer questions that may aid in bringing awareness to liberate women who are at

¹ Marvin Sapp, "I Believe," Youtube, <https://mail.google.com/mail/u/0/?shva=1#inbox/FMfcgzQVwnXcQvCdjtKZDjkgFKBTDFm>.

times subjugated due to their gender and society's gendered roles. Sociology aligns with my project, entitled "Developing Leadership Principles for Women: Acknowledging, Identifying and Addressing Gender Biases" in my context of New Webster United Methodist Church in Wadmalaw, South Carolina. This research allows me to investigate how women experience gender discrimination within and beyond the local congregation of faith leaders. More specifically, this chapter will proceed by defining sociology, exploring pioneers in sociology and how their work impacts society, while documenting key social movements in sociology and how these movements challenge systemic societal injustices. It is my desire to analyze and provide documentation of manners in which sociologists have extensively studied gender discrimination, exploring its various forms, causes, and consequences within society. Twentieth century sociologists, such as Keller and Reuther, address gender roles and gender inequality advocating for women's rights and manners in which women's opportunities and roles are constrained by societal norms.² Keller provide research that shed light on how expectations of masculinity impact men and contribute to gender inequalities. This research plays a crucial role in shaping the field of gender studies to assist with understanding and bringing awareness to the social dynamics of gender discrimination and gender inequality, giving voice to the many struggles and efforts when addressing and advocating to eliminate gender-based discrimination.³

² Ila Alexander Fisher, "Eliza Garrett: To Follow a Vision," in *Spirituality and Social Responsibility: Vocational Vision of Women in the United Methodist Tradition*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1993), 53.

³ Fisher, "Eliza Garrett: To Follow a Vision," 53.

Sociology emphasizes that “human life is social life.”⁴ E. Guy Talbott, in his essay “The Relation Between Theology and Sociology,” makes the case that theology and sociology are both rooted in relationships. He writes, “Theology is the science of man’s relations to God; sociology is the science of man’s relation to his fellow men.”⁵ The idea or image of a leader in most people’s mind is a male. Most sociologists view sex and gender as the results of societal expectations and norms, rather than fixed roles by biology.⁶ Sociologists’ research aligns with this project as it explores and brings awareness to give voice to societies’ gender biases in “Developing Leadership Principles for Women: Acknowledging, Identifying and Addressing Gender Biases.” The context of this project is the New Webster United Methodist Church of Wadmalaw, South Carolina.

Dr. Kimberle Crenshaw argues in her book, *Seeing Race Again*, that every discipline has an origin story that is complicit with white supremacy. Racial hierarchy and colonialism structured the foundations of most disciplines’ research and teaching paradigms. Dr. Crenshaw’s essays argue that many sociologists emphasize a diverse perspective on gender discrimination’s root causes and consequences, arguing that gender is not simply a biologically determined characteristic, but gender is socially constructed.

⁴ Carl L. Bankston, *Sociology Basics* (Pasadena, CA: Salem Press, 2000), 2, <http://www.aspresolver.com/aspresolver.asp?TCR11914670>.

⁵ E Guy Talbott, “The Relation between Sociology,” in *The Biblical World*, ed. William Rainey Harper, Ernest Dewitt Burton, and Shailer Matthews (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1915), 162.

⁶ Talbott, “The Relation between Sociology,” 16.

This view stems from societal norms, institutions, and cultural beliefs concerning race as much as gender, male and female.⁷

Crenshaw also gives critical insight into various sociologists' views of theories of religion and how those theories can be used to analyze the role of religion in contemporary societies. In her article, "Sociology: Promise and Potential Through Praxis," Cheryl Joseph vividly describes how her childhood experience of temporarily moving to Los Angeles and falling from a comfortable working class to a lower-class lifestyle "forced [her] to remove the blinders of familiarity and look past a way of life [she] had assumed was normal."⁸ This new perspective allowed her to start developing a sociological eye and notice patterns in society of which she had been unaware. It also gave her the drive to use her sociological imagination to critically analyze the world around her and to find ways to "put sociology into action" and address inequities in society.

Maria Gomez's work, "Human Rights and the Sociological Imagination: How Sociologists Can Help Make the World a Better Place," illustrates how the tools and perspective of sociology can both illuminate and help efforts to alleviate injustice. Gomez, who work as a human rights advocate, uses her sociological background to great effect in her work with the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and

⁷ George Lipsitz, "The Sounds of Silence: How Race Neutrality Preserves White supremacy," in *Seeing Race Again: Countering Colorblindness across the Disciplines*, ed. Kimberlé Crenshaw, Luke Charles Harris, Daniel HoSang, and George Lipsitz (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2019), 23-51.

⁸ Cheryl Joseph, "Sociology: Promise and Potential Through Praxis," in *Sociologists in Action: Sociology, Social Change, and Social Justice*, 2nd ed., ed. Kathleen Odell Korgen, Jonathan M. White, and Shelley K. White (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2013), 1, [https:// search.eb scohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true &scope =site&db=nlebk&db= nlabk&AN=1069132](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1069132).

other human rights organizations. By creating policy change for the Affordable Care Act, partnering with social agencies, fundraising, and so much more, Maria helped create “concrete policy change” and a “more socially just world.”⁹

Judith Wittner, in her article “Stand Up and Speak Out,” discusses how she enabled her students to “look beyond the information given out by news sources to question the motives of people in positions of authority, to learn why society operates as it does, and to *act* on it.”¹⁰ In ceding the traditional power of the professor in the classroom, she revealed that the individual classroom experience is part of a politics of knowledge affecting subordinate groups more generally. She argues that such awareness “is a critical first step toward building a citizenry liberated from mainstream media’s control of political ideas and actions.”¹¹ Wittner’s argument is vitally important in stressing the importance of family structure and the functioning of social networks as part of her discussion of culture. She further stresses the importance of academia by recounting women’s scholarly contributions in distinct disciplines in women studies as she tracks how levels of biases operate inside and outside the academic world. In society, Judith’s article, “Stand Up and Speak Out.” is very significant in addressing gender bias and teaching women to stand up for their rights. However, she wrote the article to teach

⁹ Maria Gomez, “Human Rights and the Sociological Imagination: How Sociologists Can Help Make the World a Better Place,” in *Sociologists in Action: Sociology, Social Change, and Social Justice*, 2nd ed., ed. Kathleen Odell Korgen, Jonathan M. White, and Shelley K. White (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2013), 22, [https:// search.eb.scohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1069132](https://search.eb.scohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1069132).

¹⁰ Judith Wittner, “Stand Up and Speak Out,” in *Sociologists in Action: Sociology, Social Change, and Social Justice*, 2nd ed., ed. Kathleen Odell Korgen, Jonathan M. White, and Shelley K. White (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2013), 3, [https:// search.eb.scohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1069132](https://search.eb.scohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1069132).

¹¹ Wittner, “Stand Up and Speak Out,” 3.

women (and men) that gender is just an idea and all of us (women and men) have the right to stand up and speak out against the biases in society and fight to make biases go away.

Georgette Bennett shows how she has used sociological tools “as a change agent and ‘action’ sociologist” during the course of her life. Throughout her many successful careers, Bennett has utilized her sociological background to make innumerable important, positive impacts on our society. Her body of impressive work includes helping to create the first sex crime unit (now popularized on “Law and Order: SVU television series”) and changing the systematic unequal treatment of women in the New York Police Department (NYPD). Bennett changed treatment for women in NYPD by hiring more women, offering diversity training, and promoting women to higher positions in leadership. She made noticeable improvements with gender sensitivity training that was adopted by other agencies and government offices. She founded the Tannenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding. In every venue, Bennett has used the unique tools of our trade to make an impact on the world.¹²

In the book, *Sociologists in Action: Sociology, Social Change, and Social Justice*, several sociologist and writers strive to bring awareness to how we can better understand sociologists’ use of intersectionality. This book explores how an analytical framework for understanding how individuals and various social and political identities result in unique

¹² Georgette Bennett, “Getting Behind the Headlines and Going Where the Action Is: My Career as A Sociologist in Non-Academic Settings,” in *Sociologists in Action: Sociology, Social Change, and Social Justice*, 2nd ed., eds. Kathleen Odell Korgen, Jonathan M. White, and Shelley K. White (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2013), 3, [https:// search.eb scohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1069132](https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1069132).

combinations of discrimination and privilege.¹³ I wholeheartedly agree with their concept of intersectionality that recognizes that individuals may experience multiple forms of oppression or privilege based on factors such as race, class, sexual orientation, and pedigree.

Gender discrimination is embedded within social institutions such as the workplace, healthcare, education and the legal system through institutional practices, policies, and procedures. These practices contribute to gender biases through pay grades, limited access to promotional opportunities, and hiring practices.¹⁴

Social holiness is a tenet of Methodist beliefs. Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe says, “Social holiness is unique to Methodism. United Methodist have a long commitment to social holiness. It is in our DNA. It is a part of who we are. John Wesley affirmed, ‘There is no religion that is not social, no holiness that is not social.’”¹⁵ Social holiness – in the context of Methodists beliefs – and sociologists maintain that structural inequality and revolution both have the propensity to effect change against systemic transgressions in the world’s social institutions. Structural inequality is defined as “a condition that arises out of attributing an unequal status to a category of people in relationship to one or more other categories of people, a relationship that is perpetuated and reinforced by a confluence of unequal relationships in roles, functions, decision rights, and

¹³ J. Brecher, B. Smith, R. Collins, J. Lembke, C. W. Mills, W. Pincus, and A. L. Strauss, “The Sociological Perspective,” in *Sociologists in Action: Sociology, Social Change, and Social Justice*, 2nd ed., eds. Kathleen Odell Korgen, Jonathan M. White, and Shelley K. White (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2013), 2, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&scope=site&db=nlebk&db=nlabk&AN=1069132>.

¹⁴ Bennett, “Getting Behind the Headlines and Going Where the Action Is,” 16-23.

¹⁵ UMC.org, “United Methodist Beliefs: Social Holiness,” September 08, 2017, <https://www.umc.org/en/content/united-methodist-beliefs-social-holiness>.

opportunities.”¹⁶ Social holiness and sociology both deal with people in the context of group behavior.

An example of structural inequality is gender pay as we find in Jim Patterson’s 2021 article “Women clergy still paid less.” Some of the key points in this article are listed below:

- Women clergy still don’t receive equivalent compensation to that enjoyed by their male counterparts, a new study shows.
- Men make up 68% of United Methodist clergy.
- Some modest progress has been made, but more commitment on the compensation issue from men and women in the church is needed, the report says.¹⁷

Compensation for women clergy in The United Methodist Church continues to trail that of their male peers according to a new study, despite progress in many annual conferences. Patterson goes on to cite the research conducted by Magaela C. Bethune, assistant professor of African American Studies at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, pointing out that “Despite the trend of women constituting over half of The United Methodist Church membership, women are significantly underrepresented among active, full-time United Methodist Church clergy and are paid significantly less than UMC clergymen.”¹⁸

¹⁶ Debbie Holt, “The Conflict Theory,” in *Introduction to Women and Gender Studies*, ed. Debbie Holt, <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/hum210/chapter/gender-stratification-and-inequality-the-conflict-perspective/>.

¹⁷ Jim Patterson, “Women clergy still paid less,” Oct. 27, 2021, UM News, www.umnews.org/en/news/women-still-paid-less.

¹⁸ Jim Patterson, “Women clergy still paid less,” in Magaela C. Bethune, “How Far We’ve Come and the Distance Still to Go: UMC Clergywomen are Still Significantly Undercompensated,” <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/partners/gcsr/home/content/how-far-weve-come-and-the-distance-still-to-go-umc-clergywomen-are-still-significantly>.

Bethune's article reminds us that "it is vital to bring awareness that in the United States, United Methodist women pastors made 8.2% less than their male counterparts in 2020, and there are far more male clergy than female in the denomination. Men make up 68.1% and women 31.9% of all United Methodist clergy."¹⁹

The disparities are moving in the right direction, but very slowly. Bethune posits, "Without intentional effort and intervention, it's insufficient to address the magnitude of the issue."²⁰ Breaking the statistics down to annual conferences, many made strides in reducing the pay gap between 2015 and 2020. Those conferences include Baltimore-Washington; Dakotas; Eastern Pennsylvania; Florida; Great Plains; Holston; Illinois Great Rivers; Louisiana; Memphis; Mississippi; New England; New York; North Texas; South Carolina; South Georgia; Susquehanna; Texas; Upper New York; West Ohio; Western Pennsylvania and Wisconsin. This shows how widespread sexual discrimination is across the spectrum of Methodism. This should not only be important to women but to all people of faith in that it speaks to a core principle of faith and that is injustice

Jim Patterson's study also looked at housing allowances and parsonages where again, women trail men in compensation.

When analyses were conducted controlling for age, years of service, clergy member type and jurisdiction, clergywomen still received significantly less salary than men in 2020 in the following conferences: Central Texas, East Ohio, Iowa, and North Georgia.

¹⁹ Jim Patterson, "Women clergy still paid less," in Magaela C. Bethune, "How Far We've Come and the Distance Still to Go: UMC Clergywomen are Still Significantly Undercompensated," <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/partners/gcsw/home/content/how-far-weve-come-and-the-distance-still-to-go-umc-clergywomen-are-still-significantly>.

²⁰ Jim Patterson, "Women clergy still paid less," in Magaela C. Bethune, "How Far We've Come and the Distance Still to Go: UMC Clergywomen are Still Significantly Undercompensated," <https://www.resourceumc.org/en/partners/gcsw/home/content/how-far-weve-come-and-the-distance-still-to-go-umc-clergywomen-are-still-significantly>.

The Southeastern Jurisdiction stands out because of its lower percentage of female clergy: 27% in 2020. The four other jurisdictions all fall between 31% and 35%.

Women are significantly underrepresented in the following annual conferences, in comparison to all other annual conferences: West Ohio, Susquehanna, Western Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Northwest Texas, Alabama-West Florida, Holston, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Alabama and South Georgia.

I know they did some significant work down in the North Alabama conference. They are still not in a great space, but there has been a little bit of improvement.²¹

One assumption in conflict theory involves revolution. Though historians and scholars have not labeled it so; nonetheless, the women's rights movement was – and still is – a revolution. This movement is a “diverse social movement, largely based in the United States, that in the 1960s and ‘70s sought equal rights and opportunities and greater personal freedom for women.”²² Karl Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, contends that overthrowing the government may be more advantageous than not. He writes, “Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have the world to win.”²³ There is an intersectionality among conflict theory, women's rights movement, and the guiding principle of an oppressed people challenging systems as projected in the work of Marx, even though his philosophy was patriarchal.

²¹ Jim Patterson, “Women clergy still paid less,” Oct. 27, 2021, UM News, www.umnews.org/en/news/women-still-paid-less.

²² Einor Burkett, “Women's Rights Movement,” Britannica, May 27, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/event/womens-movement>.

²³ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group, 2018), 58.

The Role and Work of Sociologists

Sociologists study the socialization process through which individuals learn and internalize gender roles and how societal norms dictate what is considered appropriate behavior for men and women, which further contribute to and promote gender stereotypes and discrimination.

Again, social holiness and sociologists recognize the importance of intersectionality, considering the import and the impact of various social categories such as race, class, and sexuality on women's experiences and leadership. Through an awareness of intersectionality, we can better acknowledge and ground the differences among us and thus understand better "the problem of pain" as C. S. Lewis states that stem from Christians whose religious imaginations encompasses fairy tales of life birthed from intellect.²⁴ Social holiness is paired here with sociology in that there can be no holiness that is not social and sociology deals with the study of people. C S Lewis' theory of human suffering is used as an instrument of change by adjusting the issues of women that are caught up in the system of male dominated beliefs, constructs, values, and practices.

Throughout this chapter, I sought to demonstrate how humans relate to each other in society and how religious institutions mimic secular institutions regarding power dynamics and gender. As stated in the introduction, my goal was to bring awareness to gender biases against women in leadership.

As I have shown throughout this Interdisciplinary Foundations research, gender bias refers to the tendency people have to prefer one gender over another. These biases in the workplace tend to negatively affect women significantly more than men. The Pew

²⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain*, 1st Touchstone ed. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 89-109.

Research Group 2017 revealed that “42 percent of women faced gender-based discrimination in the workplace, compared to just 22 percent of men. The picture becomes bleaker for women of color, with 51 percent reporting experiences of racism and discrimination.”²⁵

It is extremely troubling to find that Matthew Urwin research from November 7, 2023, revealed that the glass ceiling is still something women face today. In 2023, women’s median earnings were only 83 percent of men’s median earnings, while just over 10 percent of Fortune 500 companies had women in CEO positions. The glass ceiling shows up in a variety of ways with plenty of negative effects. Some of them are,

- ✓ Receiving less pay than colleagues of a different gender who do the same job.
- ✓ Being passed over for promotions or other important career opportunities.
- ✓ Experiencing microaggressions regularly.
- ✓ Feeling isolated.
- ✓ Being treated as incompetent.
- ✓ Getting rejected from a job.

I can identify with Matthew and his research that the New Webster United Methodist Church has a long way to go to even the playing field for women. If business leaders and human resource professionals do not take intentional steps to bolster their organization’s “Diversity, Equity, an Inclusion” (DEI) efforts to empower women and marginalized groups, the glass ceiling may persist and negatively affect the company culture.²⁶

While Urwin states that, the term glass ceiling was first used in 1978 by writer and consultant Marilyn Loden at a panelist discussion about women in the workplace. We

²⁵ Kim Parker and Cary Funk, “Gender discrimination comes in many forms for today’s working women,” December 14, 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-read/2017/12/14/gender-discrimination-comes-in-many-forms>.

²⁶ Matthew Urwin, “The Glass Ceiling: Definition, History and Examples,” Built In, November 7, 2023, www.builtin.com/diversity-inclusion/glass-ceiling.

read that Loden described the cultural challenges women face when their careers stagnate at middle-management roles, preventing them from attaining higher leadership or executive positions.²⁷ Urwin further shared that, “Sociologists analyze the existence of a “glass ceilings,” a metaphorical barrier that prevents women from reaching top leadership positions. They examine structural barriers such as discriminatory practices, gender biases, and institutional norms that hinder women’s advancement and various fields.”²⁸

Communal Factors

Communal norms and values determine the roles that are defined for men and women. Different cultures have different ideas as to what is appropriate for males and females. The socialization of males and females begins with birth and continues throughout life. Growing up in Walterboro, South Carolina, I am a surviving victim of how society encourages the male to be independent and the female to be dependent, of how to be subservient, while my brothers were shown how to make women to be servants. Like so many women in my generation and past generations, I am an overcomer.

A vocal leader of the twentieth century women’s suffrage movement, Alice Paul, advocated for and helped secure passage of the 19th Amendment to the U S Constitution,

²⁷ Matthew Urwin, “The Glass Ceiling: Definition, History and Examples,” Built In, November 7, 2023, www.builtin.com/diversity-inclusion/glass-ceiling.

²⁸ Matthew Urwin, “The Glass Ceiling: Definition, History and Examples,” Built In, November 7, 2023, www.builtin.com/diversity-inclusion/glass-ceiling.

granting women the right to vote. Paul authored the “Equal Rights Amendment” in 1923, which has yet to be adopted.²⁹

As an African American female working in an Anglican denomination in the south, it is vital to mention Janet L. Allured’s article which addresses the issues of women in leadership, gender, and Jim Crow, because the article looks at African American women in the Methodist Episcopal Church, South, between 1884 and 1939. This is vital as it notes the barriers of race throughout history. She further notes that, there is no comprehensive resource in the history of the Methodist (and related) traditions to advocate for women leaders, nor is there a concise history easily accessible.”³⁰³¹ Because of these historical barriers, the aim is to work toward comprehensive change in the future and offer a model for bringing awareness and other means to offer advocacy resources. This chapter is to bring to light the important role of women in social holiness traditions.

Rather than focus on individual behaviors, sociology take its cues from what James Henslin, in his book *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach*, calls “the study of the recurring aspects of life in society.”³² Henslin continues that sociology is concerned with group membership and face-to-face interaction. Group membership, according to Henslin, garners the attention of structural sociologists, who study “how membership in a

²⁹ Debra Michals, ed., “Alice Paul,” 2015, www.womenshistory.org/education-resources/biographies/alice-paul.

³⁰ Janet L. Allured, “Southern Methodist Women and the Fight for Racial and Gender Justice, 1939-1990,” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 38, no. 2 (2022): 105-124, <https://doi.org/10.2979/jfeministstudrel.38.2.08>.

³¹ Allured, “Southern Methodist Women and the Fight for Racial and Gender Justice, 1939–1990.” 105-124.

³² James M. Henslin, *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach*, 6th ed. (Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2003), 100.

group such as religion, influences people's behaviors and attitudes, such as how they vote, or perhaps how education affects their opinions on social issues."³³ Structural sociologists also study how people interact with social issues based upon age, gender, sex, occupation, race, ethnicity, or geography.

A major focus in sociology is how individuals interact with each other. Henslin maintains that sociologists in this area "focus on what people do when they are in the presence of one another. They observe their behavior, recording the interaction by taking notes or by using tape, video, film, or digitized technology. Other sociologists tap people's attitudes and behaviors more directly by interviewing them."³⁴ The goal is to "draw conclusions about people's attitudes and what significantly affect their lives."³⁵ There is no getting around humans interacting with each other in every facet of their lives. Bankston contends, "From the families we are born into, through school, work, and play; retirements; and even the gatherings that memorialize our deaths, we spend our lives within a tapestry woven of interlocking social arrangements."³⁶ Even as humans share their lives, they also bring with them diverse ways of living, being, and doing. These differences may result in disagreements, conflict, and war.

³³ Henslin, *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach*, 100.

³⁴ *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach*, 100.

³⁵ *Sociology: A Down to Earth Approach*, 100.

³⁶ Bankston, *Sociology Basics*, 2.

Traditional Influences

French Philosopher Auguste Comte is considered the father of sociology. He preferred to call it social physics as a scientific means to study the “nature of the social universe created by people’s behaviors, interactions, and patterns of social organizations.”³⁷ Comte maintains there are two fields of sociology. The first is social statics, which is the “study of the forces that hold society together,”³⁸ and social dynamics, “the study of the causes of social change.”³⁹

Another pioneer in sociology is Emile Durkheim, whose concern is “primarily with order, consensus, solidarity, social morality and systems of religion.”⁴⁰ He is the first to define sociology as an academic discipline. He argues, “sociologists should study specific features of collective group life and sociology is the study of social facts, things which are external to, and coercive of individuals. These social facts are features of the group, and cannot be studied apart from the collective, nor can they be derived from the study of individuals.”⁴¹

However, in Gary Dorrien’s dialogue, *Cannon, William and Womanist Survival*, the womanist intervention in Black theology was coming for years before it yielded a critical mass of womanist and Black feminist theologians. All the Black theologians

³⁷ Jonathan H. Turner, *Theoretical Sociology: A Concise Introduction to Twelve Sociological Theories* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2014), 1.

³⁸ Ronald Fletcher, “Auguste Comte: French Philosopher,” <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Auguste-Comte>.

³⁹ Fletcher, “Auguste Comte: French Philosopher.”

⁴⁰ University of Regina Department of Sociology and Social Studies, “Sociology of Emile Durkheim,” <https://uregina.ca/~gingrich/250j1503.htm>.

⁴¹ University of Regina Department of Sociology and Social Studies, “Sociology of Emile Durkheim,” <https://uregina.ca/~gingrich/250j1503.htm>.

studied were male and all the female theologians were white.⁴² Womanists said they could not identify with the heroic male radicalism of Black liberation theology or the sisterhood-universalism of white feminist theology. If they were going to enter the theological academy and the ordained ministry, they had to theologize out of their own experiences as Black women who had survived multiple intersecting forms of denigration.⁴³

The founders of womanist theology earned doctoral degrees at Union Theological Seminary in the 1980s or early 1990s — Jacquelyn Grant, Katie G. Cannon, Delores S. Williams, and Kelly Brown Douglas.⁴⁴ These womanist founders worked together and supported each other, defying the competitive ethos of the academy. They wrote about seeking wholeness in one's life, being attuned to the God within, working for justice, and building peaceable communities that enable all people to flourish. Cannon, Williams, Douglas, and Emilie Townes identified womanism with the view that theologies of redemptive suffering are pernicious. This is important because it shows that these women were more than scholars and writers. They were engaged in identifying wrong, working to correct it, and mentoring others at the same time. If this contradicted Martin Luther King Jr., the Black liberation theology of James Cone, and most of the Black church tradition, most of the womanist founders were willing to say so. But womanists were not

⁴² Gary Dorrien, "Cannon, Williams, and Womanist Survival," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Autumn/Winter 2022): <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/cannon-williams-and-womanist-survival/>.

⁴³ Gary Dorrien, "Cannon, Williams, and Womanist Survival," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Autumn/Winter 2022): <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/cannon-williams-and-womanist-survival/>.

⁴⁴ Gary Dorrien, "Cannon, Williams, and Womanist Survival," *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Autumn/Winter 2022): <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/cannon-williams-and-womanist-survival/>.

one-view-only on any subject, and nearly all womanists of the first and second generations were committed to the church.⁴⁵

*Sociological Theory That Speaks to Injustice, Power, Dominance:
Karl Marx - Social Conflict Theory*

Karl Heinrich Marx, a German philosopher, economist, historian, and sociologist, is credited for popularizing the Social Conflict Theory (SCT) in the social science arena. Marx contends that conflict is inevitable as “those in possession of wealth and resources will protect and hoard those resources while those without will do whatever they can to obtain them.”⁴⁶ In essence, the haves and the have nots will be in a perpetual state of conflict. Sociologist Ashley Crossman writes, “tensions and conflicts arise when resources, status, and power are unevenly distributed between groups and that these conflicts become the engine for social change.”⁴⁷ Marx’s theory asserts that those who hold the power also control multiple facets of life, including politics, material resources, and social institutions. The study of Karl Marx lends itself to understanding the depth of people (women) who are disenfranchised. As an exploited class of people, the proletariat are exploited. The Communist Manifesto shares his thoughts. There are parallels in the context of women being exploited and there is a need for a working template to address

⁴⁵ Gary Dorrien, “Cannon, Williams, and Womanist Survival,” *Harvard Divinity Bulletin* (Autumn/Winter 2022): <https://bulletin.hds.harvard.edu/cannon-williams-and-womanist-survival/>.

⁴⁶ Corporate Finance Institute, “Conflict Theory: The Never -Ending Competition for Resources,” <https://corporatefinanceinstitute.com/resources/economics/conflict-theory/>.

⁴⁷ Ashley Crossman, “Understanding Conflict Theory,” July 31, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/conflict-theory-3026622>.

and overcome women who are now the proletariat to fight and win their freedom in today's society as equal to men.

Marx bases his Social Conflict Theory on “the causes and consequences of class conflict between the bourgeoisie (the owners of the means of production and the capitalists) and the proletariat (the working class and the poor.)”⁴⁸ He concludes that the minority powerful class is at odds with the majority oppressed class as the power and resources are in the hands of a few. “Marx reasoned that [as] the socio-economic conditions worsened for the proletariat, they would develop a class consciousness that revealed their exploitation at the hands of the wealthy capitalist class of bourgeoisie, and then they would revolt, demanding changes to smooth the conflict.”⁴⁹ This power dynamics show up on Sunday mornings in the Black church which is filled with women and children. A cursory examination of Sunday morning church attendees in Wadmalaw, South Carolina, bears Marx's assertion that being in the majority does not always lead to possession of power and authority. Often women make up the bulk of attendees and provide the bulk of donations. Conflict theory suggests society is defined by a struggle for dominance among social groups that compete for scarce resources. In the context of gender, conflict theory argues that gender is best understood as men attempting to maintain power and privilege to the detriment of women.⁵⁰ In this structure, the dominant

⁴⁸ Crossman, “Understanding Conflict Theory.”

⁴⁹ Debbie Holt, “The Conflict Theory,” in *Introduction to Women and Gender Studies*, ed. Debbie Holt, <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/hum210/chapter/gender-stratification-and-inequality-the-conflictperspective/>.

⁵⁰ Debbie Holt, “The Conflict Theory,” in *Introduction to Women and Gender Studies*, ed. Debbie Holt, <https://viva.pressbooks.pub/hum210/chapter/gender-stratification-and-inequality-the-conflictperspective/>.

group is men, and the subordinate group is women, as men have in most cases

“historically held most of the world’s resources.”⁵¹

There are four primary assumptions in modern conflict theory. They are:

- Competition, which suggests that competition is always present in every human relationship and interaction. Competition rather than consensus is characteristic of human relationships.
- Structural inequality, which speaks to the idea that inequalities are built into all social structures. Individuals and groups that benefit from any particular structure strive to see it maintained.
- Revolution, which contends that change occurs as a result of conflict between social classes competing interests rather than through adaption.
- War at times serves as a unifier of the societies involved, while other time demolishing societies.⁵²

Of the four assumptions – structural inequality and revolution – all have the propensity to effect change against systemic transgressions in the world’s social institutions. Structural inequality is defined as “a condition that arises out of attributing an unequal status to a category of people in relationship to one or more other categories of people, a relationship that is perpetuated and reinforced by a confluence of unequal relationships in roles, functions, decision rights, and opportunities.”⁵³ According to Kimberly Amadeo, structural inequality is “a system of privilege created by institutions within an economy. These institutions include the law, business practices, and government policies. They also include education, health care, and the media. They are

⁵¹ Holt, “The Conflict Theory.”

⁵² New World Encyclopedia, “Conflict Theory,” www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/conflict_theory.

⁵³ Anis A. Dani and Arjan de Haan, *Inclusive States: Social Policy and Structural Inequalities* (Washington, DC: The World Bank, 2008), 3.

powerful socializing agents that tell us what we can achieve within society.”⁵⁴ Amadeo suggests that structural inequalities are the result of policies and laws that are put in place and those policies and laws have “advantages for some and disadvantages for others. When the laws work against specific groups, inequality becomes part of the structure of the market.”⁵⁵

One assumption in conflict theory involves revolutions, which the *Pocket Oxford American Dictionary* defines as a “forcible overthrow of a government or social order in favor of a new system.”⁵⁶ Marx, in *The Communist Manifesto*, contends that overthrowing the government may be more advantageous than not. He writes, “Let the ruling classes tremble at a Communistic revolution. The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains. They have the world to win.”⁵⁷

While conflict is inevitable, a positive outcome is not because it depends on how much the oppressed is willing to struggle as the controlling faction controls the fight. Alan Maas, in his article, “Marx’s Theory of Working-Class Revolution,” writes, “As Marx described, all class societies produce a legal, political, and ideological ‘superstructure’ that operates to freeze the existing relations of production and protect the rulers from the ruled.”⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Kimberly Amadeo, “What is Structural Inequality: How Structural Inequality Stifles the American Dream,” March 26, 2022, <https://www.thebalancemoney.com/structural-inequality-facts-typescauses-solution-4174727>.

⁵⁵ Amadeo, “What is Structural Inequality: How Structural Inequality Stifles the American Dream.”

⁵⁶ *Pocket Oxford American Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s. v. “revolution” (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), 709.

⁵⁷ Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (Minneapolis, MN: Lerner Publishing Group, 2018), 58.

The outcome of social revolution is a change in social order and social structure. Jean-Pierre Reed contends, “Their outcomes, as such, are usually associated with the transition to modernity, the rise of capitalism, and the emergence of democracy.”⁵⁹ Reed, a sociology professor, posits that social revolutions are different from political revolutions. He writes, “Compared to political revolutions, which are typically orchestrated from above, social revolutions are mass based. Their root causes are structural in nature, and the processes associated with their mobilization typically involve cultural, psychological and political factors.”⁶⁰

Women in the New Webster United Methodist Church and beyond concur with Rosemary Skinner Keller who argues in her book, *In Our Owns Voices*, that “there is a common assumption in the lives of women in the church, sports, community, and world that the male experience is normative with neutral consequences and women have particular consequences in life.”⁶¹ She goes on to say that, “women’s experiences and feminist theology, that her feminist perspective as a woman is not ‘an add on or and, add on or afterthought’ to theology but an alternative way of doing theology based on her own experience and identity as a woman.”⁶² She further argues that this is tremendously

⁵⁸ Alan Maass, “Marx’s Theory of Working-Class Revolution,” International Socialist Organization, October 14, 2020, <https://socialistworker.org/2010/10/14/marxs-theory-of-working-class.revolution>.

⁵⁹ Jean-Pierre Reed, “Revolutions,” Oxford Bibliographies, January 15, 2015, <https://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199756384/obo-9780199756384-0115.xml>.

⁶⁰ Reed, “Revolutions.”

⁶¹ Rosemary Skinner Keller, “Introduction: Gender and the Multicultural Worlds of Women and Religion in America,” in *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women’s Religious Writing*, ed. Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 7-16.

⁶² Keller, “Introduction,” 7-16.

important to male and female readers of leadership theory because the issues of women leaders are not special interest issues that are relevant to women only.⁶³

Generational Dynamics

In her book, *In Our Own Voices*, Keller shares that a 1993 statement on identity and vision of the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church's Board of Global Ministries is of value. This addressed the historic challenge to rid the church and society of the "Christian Mystique."⁶⁴ Christian Mystique, as defined in Starhawk's book, is a tradition of mystical practices and theology within Christianity which "concerns the preparation of the person for the consciousness of, and the effect of a direct transformative presence of God."⁶⁵ This speaks clearly to the subject of gender biases and the work of women in the life of the church who have not been recognized for their spiritual gifts, passion, and inclusion for ministry.

Keller's research states that the combined barriers of racism, sexism, and class divisions become inseparable in the lives of an individual woman suffering oppression, a youth seeing no future, or a child struggling to survive. She goes on to conclude that, "these same barriers work within our United Methodist Churches and agencies. They limit each of us from fully carrying out God's mission in the world. Confronting these barriers in ourselves, our institutions and our world underlies all of our mission."⁶⁶

⁶³ Keller, "Introduction," 7-16.

⁶⁴ Rosemary Skinner Keller and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *In Our Own Voices: Four Centuries of American Women's Religious Writing*, 1st ed. (San Francisco, CA: Harper San Francisco, 1996), 8.

⁶⁵ Keller and Ruether, *In Our Own Voices*, 16-29.

⁶⁶ Keller and Ruether, *In Our Own Voices*, 7-11.

I concur with Keller that we – women – continue to face the historic dilemma which assigns only to women the concern for ministries with women, children, and youth such as usher president, youth and children chair, chair of higher education, and others. I fly the flag of bringing awareness and calling out practices that continue to make these “women’s concerns” known because our priority is to stir up the larger church and the society to bring awareness to their reluctance to take the lead. Keller’s research concludes that until women receive a stronger voice in the decisions affecting their lives, their number one concern will be to continue growing strong advocates in the general population to help champion the cause. I am empowered by Keller’s proclamation that calls for the whole church and society to share the urgency of this mission.⁶⁷

Keller further found that in the final decade of the 20th century and with more than 100 years behind us, the women in the United Methodist Church are engaged in invigorating our programs with women, children, and youth. We have initiated new structures with the other units of the General Board of Global Ministries to ensure that these concerns are given higher priority. Both the National and World Divisions of the Board have established offices that deal primarily with ministries with women and, in the World Division with children and youth as well. These offices keep before the divisions and the church special issues and programs. They are catalysts and energizers working with other staff and board members to sensitize them to the continuing situations of women, children, and youth and to provide arenas for networking.⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Keller and Ruether, *In Our Own Voices*, 12-13.

⁶⁸ Keller and Ruether, *In Our Own Voices*, 13-15.

Keeler also found that while these things were occurring in the internal structure, other things were occurring in the church and in the society. For example, the 1973 General Conference created an independent General Commission on the Status and Role of Women dedicated to eliminating sexism. Although this move was initiated and strongly supported by the Women's Division, it was seen as a necessity for the whole church.⁶⁹

I believe that this project's findings are extremely important because these findings from the Women's Division in the United Methodist Church is a lay movement directed by volunteers with an executive staff of laywomen. It heartily supports the role of women clergy and the role of women as bishops, but the emphasis of United Methodist Women, currently known as United Women in Faith, is toward laywomen's empowerment for mission. This empowerment includes diversity of women in leadership roles in the life of the church beyond the work of mission.

Again, this work and these findings are paramount going forward in that the United Methodist Church's other institutions and universities cannot continue being "reactive" through programs that take care of people after they are broken. They must be "transformers" by changing the system, eliminating barriers, and being pro-active. I am well aware that transformation can be and even seem riskier, but it is where we, New Webster United Methodist Church, believe the gospel compels us to move.

In humility, I state my belief that the simple and powerful message of liberation is being spoken to and through women in a new way today; this includes advocacy, activism, rallies, circles, Bible study, and so many other areas. I believe this is a valuable

⁶⁹ Keller and Ruether, *In Our Own Voices*, 16.

gift for the whole church, and I solicit you the reader for support as women continue to recall, tell, and celebrate our story.

Katie Cannon: Race, Gender, and Lived Experience

Dr. Katie Geneva Cannon, the first African American woman ordained in the Presbyterian Church, developed an intersectional framework that revolutionized theological ethics by emphasizing the importance of lived experiences at the crossroads of multiple oppressions. Cannon states that, “Historic practices continued to assign the Black female to an inferior status in the general society.”⁷⁰ This leads me to assert that gender bias is deeply rooted in longstanding practices which continue to relegate Black women to a subordinate status within broader society. Cannon also states that when Christian ethical norms are primarily shaped by the experiences of white men, the moral agency of Black women becomes either problematic or altogether disregarded. This perspective underpins Cannon’s critique of gender bias within religious and academic settings, as articulated in chapter 3 of her work, “Black Womanist Ethics”

Black women, in their development, analysis, and evaluation of coping mechanisms in response to a white-oriented, male-structured society, do not rely upon fixed rules or absolute principles of morality. Instead, they embrace values informed by the specific circumstances of their cultural context.⁷¹

As I delved further into Cannon’s work, I found that she maintains that the invisibility of Black women results not merely from exclusion but from a deliberately

⁷⁰ Katie G. Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1988), 46.

⁷¹ Cannon, *Black Womanist Ethics*, 75.

perpetuated silence upheld by institutional practices that favor certain groups while systematically suppressing others. Her work demonstrates that gender bias functions as a structural system influencing which ethical questions are deemed significant and whose moral perspectives are legitimized.

By employing an intersectional lens, Cannon calls for a reevaluation of the foundations of ethical thought and challenges established notions regarding which individuals or groups are recognized as moral agents. The frameworks presented in “Black Womanist Ethics” advocate for an approach that appreciates the complexity of human experience and encourages scholars to reassess methodologies to ensure that intersectional dimensions are adequately addressed in ethical analysis. Recognizing Cannon’s contributions involves engaging with a diverse range of social experiences and moral viewpoints, particularly those of marginalized communities. Cannon’s approach considers how race, gender, and class intersects to shape lived experiences within faith communities.

Conclusion

In summary, Dr. Jacquelyn Grant argues that both social theologians – womanist theologians and liberation theologians – and sociology contribute to a significant understanding of women in leadership by challenging traditional norms, advocating for inclusivity, and exploring the structural barriers that women face. Grant says in patriarchy, women’s lives are carefully controlled and constrained so that, through socialization, human personality is guided along lines of sex category (the masculine and the feminine). Grant asserts that theology and Christology have developed in this context,

in which the male is projected as the valued entity and the female is projected as devalued entity.⁷²

So often we find that gender is tied to power. A traditional understanding of gender and power points out that men can – and often do – dominate women. In the 1970s, feminists in the United States and around the world criticized the ways that men excluded women from the workplace and politics. They questioned men’s status as household heads, demanded an end to rape and domestic abuse, and argued against the idea that men were naturally strong or aggressive and women were naturally weak and nurturing. Still, men continue to exercise direct power over women in much of the world. For instance, this traditional understanding of gender and power suggests that men often use their interpersonal and institutional power to make decisions about women’s bodies (e.g., whether they should have babies or what they should wear) and about their labor (e.g., whether they should work outside the home or whether they should earn as much money as men).⁷³

With numerous advocates and activists seeking to bring awareness daily to the openly societal and other forms of gender biases, I found it quite disheartening to read Nathaniel Myersohn’s article on the CNN website, entitled “What the conversation about Caitlin Clark’s pay gets wrong.” He brought worldwide observance to the differences in gender pay. The number one draft pick for the WNBA’s salary (\$76,535) pales in

⁷² Jacquelyn Grant, *White Women’s Christ and Black Women’s Jesus: Feminist Christology and Womanist Response* (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1989), 78-79.

⁷³ Abigail Andrews, Raka Ray, and Jennifer Carlson, *The Social Life of Gender* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2018), 1-18, doi: <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781506300054>.

comparison to the number one draft pick for the NBA's salary (\$10.5 million).⁷⁴ Women continue to advocate to bring awareness to the gross issues of fairness to women on every level of leadership.

Despite gendered roles, structural inequalities, and patriarchy, women continue to do the work of ministry as leaders. I can attest to the fact that my home church SUMC has never had a female pastor. I have pastored eighteen years in five appointments, and four of those appointments had never had a female pastor. This was troubling to me because all of them except one was over 100 years old.

It is my hope that this research and my final project stirs up women who have been called to lead but experience rejection because of their gender. This research should compel others to work towards bridging the gap regarding gender biases and the leadership of women in social holiness traditions. In an effort to bring to light the conscious and unconscious prejudices against women leaders and offer resources to advocate for reflective change, I hope that both women and men will first realize that struggle and conflict are inevitable in society. My prayer is that women are intentional in fulfilling their God-ordained call with or without the support of those in control. Lastly, it is my hope that women find ways to circumvent structure inequalities, systems, and practices that seek to silence them.

⁷⁴ Nathaniel Meyersohn, "What the Conversation about Caitlin Clark's pay gets wrong," New York, NY: CNN, 6:57pm EDT, April 17, 2024, www.cnn.com Raka Rayad.Jennifer Carlson.

CHAPTER SIX

PROJECT ANALYSIS

Introduction

Gender bias is the tendency to provide preferential treatment toward one gender over another or have prejudice against a certain gender. I have been the victim of unconscious bias where church folk stereotype or hold preconceived notions about me based on personal or learned experiences. Some of those unconscious biases flooded my thoughts and tugged at my mental health during the November 2024 presidential election. I reminisced on the many times I was told that “women cannot lead men, women must act like a man, and women are too emotional.” I was told those same things about a woman being leader of the free world and watched as America voted a twisted, diabolical tyrant into office just because America was too afraid to support a woMAN. Yet, God used a woMAN to bring Jesus into this world. God did what America was too weak and closed-minded to do for this free world. So, now we have small businesses closing, federal jobs going away, unemployment rising, daily living expenses rising, planes literally falling out the sky, tuition rising, tuition assistance gutted, and so much more. I have also been a victim of conscious bias where male preachers introduce me as sister Gordon instead of Reverend Gordon, while I was the eulogist or revivalist at their church.

My life has always been one of survival and endurance. On my journey I have learned many lessons — some the hard way. When I first contemplated this program, I

was angry and very opinionated about my context's understanding and attitudes towards women in church leadership. However, my Rooted (doctoral focus group) family helped me to first concentrate on "me" — understand my hurts and pray for my healing before attempting to reach across the aisle with argumentative and ambiguous comments.

Anger, coupled with giving voice to women in leadership who face cultural and generational patriarchal systems and practices that normalized the need for women to pursue women positions in the church dominated my Spiritual Autobiography. Through constructive feedback from my professional associates, mentors, faculty consultant, and peers, I forged ahead to birth a research project entitled, "Developing Leadership Principles for Women: Acknowledging, Identifying, and Addressing Gender Bias." My task is to create a model to help women/persons acknowledge, identify and address gender discrimination and to give voice to the oppressive acts towards women in leadership. This work seeks to bring awareness to cultural, patriarchal, and society norms used to discriminate and silence women in leadership positions. My context participants are women at New Webster United Methodist Church in Wadmalaw, South Carolina. My hypothesis is that if ministry leaders participate in a six-week training about gender bias and discrimination in ministry, then they will be equipped to advocate for gender equality in Christian ministry. My hypothesis liberates women/persons to fulfill their God given right to serve God's children in any capacity, including leadership. People can already take note that women serve in leadership positions in every field of employment. This project's task was to raise awareness of gender discrimination of women in leadership and allow women to speak out against the numerous manners in which they are discriminated against because of gender. The project allowed women to empower

women, I used the biblical text that reminds women that God can use any willing vessel to get God's job of making disciples (Matthew 28:19-20) done.

I witnessed women come together in sisterhood, sharing meals, sharing stories, shedding tears, and praying together as we encouraged one another to boldly allow God to use us and go forth and seek out communities of support from like-minded women. As evident in my Spiritual Autobiography, as an African American clergy woman in the United Methodist Church, my personal journey has been filled with struggles and successes, yet, I have continued to navigate patriarchal systems and practices that seek to devalue, dehumanize, and demonize my call to preach. Much of the rejection emanates from biblical texts, (1 Timothy 2:11-12; 1 Corinthians 11:1-16; and I Corinthians 14:34-35), that are primarily used to justify the ways many men view and treat women in the church. Patriarchy is an aged-old practice that is felt, seen, and heard throughout every fabric of society and it is unlikely that it will ever be eradicated. Still, there are strategies and models that women leaders may employ to pursue and to succeed. The target context for this project is New Webster United Methodist Church on Wadmalaw Island located in the Low Country of South Carolina. There are seven churches in this targeted area — many of which do not recognize or affirm preaching women. In this area, there is only two churches that have been led by a woman in well over 141 years. In conversations with fellow pastors and members of churches in the area, it is clear that men dominate church-wide offices in leadership as pastor, chair of trustee, deacon, administrative council chair, and others. The current landscape of church attendance reflects that women make up the majority and generally are the most faithful in attendance and financial support. Yet, to my dismay and based upon my experience, even as women are the

majority, men are too adamant that women should not be pastoring or hold certain positions in the church. Women in the Johns Island Parish (New Webster and Bethlehem St James) shared everything from older women sayings, to employment, and to scripture readings used to defend generational and cultural teachings.

Participants agree that women contribute a great deal to the ministry of religious communities throughout history. I find it troubling that churches continue to struggle with the role of women in leadership. New Webster along with so many other churches are faced with the question of where to place women in ministry; for instance, the Southern Baptist Convention expelled women from pulpit ministry utilizing “the Baptist Faith and Message 2000,” which makes it clear that “the office of pastor/elder/overseer is limited to men as qualified by scripture” and cites 1 Timothy 2:9-14, 1 Timothy 3:1-15 and Titus 2:3-5, among other passages.¹ And in his book *The Accommodation and Liberation of Women in the Church Of God In Christ*, H. Carlyle Church, Jr. affirms that within the Church Of God In Christ (COGIC) The Women’s Department is the largest department in the COGIC denomination and yet the church firmly believes that women are “gifted” and called to ministry and to serve their spiritual community in such a way. However, “most higher-level clergy are in agreement that women should not be ordained as ministers.”² Then there is The Catholic Church letter from 1994, where Pope John Paul II “formally declared that the Church does not have the power to ordain women.” He stated,

¹ Bfm.sbc, “Baptist Faith and Message 2000,” <https://bfm.sbc.net/bfm2000/#xiv.%20Baptist%20Faith%20&Message%202000>.

² H. Carlyle Church, Jr., “The Accommodation and Liberation of Women in the Church of God in Christ,” *Journal of Religious Thought* (December 1, 1995): 77-90.

Although the teaching that priestly ordination is to be reserved to men alone has been preserved by the constant and universal Tradition of the Church and firmly taught by the magisterium in its more recent documents, at the present time in some places it is nonetheless considered still open to debate, or the Church's judgment that women are not to be admitted to ordination is considered to have a merely disciplinary force.³

He further stated that, "wherefore, in order that all doubt may be removed regarding a matter of great importance, a matter that pertains to the Church's divine constitution itself, in virtue of my ministry of confirming the brethren (cf. Luke 22:32) I declare that the Church has no authority whatsoever to confer priestly ordination on women and that this judgment is to be definitively held by all the Church's faithful" (Ordinatio Sacerdotalis 4).⁴ Such rulings are a clear call to action for women to resist being silent and subservient while being willing to bring awareness to patriarchal systems and practices to effect positive change.

Methodology

The methodology used to evaluate this project was a mixture of methods that included daily use of a concept maps, pre- and post-questionnaires, Bible Word Study, group discussion and journaling. The concepts maps were used to give a visual picture of common themes and trends. The pre- and post-questionnaires were used to chart growth. The Bible Word Study was used to share God's ability to use anyone at any time. The group discussions and journaling were great tools of understanding hurts as we move

³ Vatican.va, "Apostolic Letter ORDINATIO SACERDOTALIS of JOHN PAUL II to the Bishops of The Catholic Church on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone," https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html.

⁴ Vatican.va, "Apostolic Letter ORDINATIO SACERDOTALIS of JOHN PAUL II to the Bishops of The Catholic Church on Reserving Priestly Ordination to Men Alone," https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/apost_letters/1994/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_19940522_ordinatio-sacerdotalis.html.

towards healing. The goal was for women to undergo life and faith change that lift women leaders in New Webster to move from brokenness to wholeness with a better understanding of what/how stereotypes operate and a heightened ability to identify and address bias thinking in themselves as well as in others

Journaling, questionnaires, group discussions, and concept mapping were powerful tools used to help with addressing gender biases and help participants reflect on their thoughts, behaviors, and experiences, bringing conscious/unconscious biases to light while creating foundations for change. Fifteen women of diverse ages, employment status, and educational backgrounds were selected and thirteen women participated. All the women have led or is currently holding a leadership role in New Webster. Of the initial contacts, one requested to participate via the conference line because of vision issues. Everyone received an invitation letter and flyer (see Appendix A) and an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B). To my excitement, thirteen women, including the one requesting to attend via the conference line, agreed to participate by returning the necessary documents. Each woman received an outline of the agenda, weekly topics, and weekly journal entry topics. To measure the hypothesis, a mixed method was used. To collect data, each participant received pre- and post-project questionnaire (see Appendix's C and D), a concept map (see Appendix G) and personal journals were given. The project implementation involved six weekly in-person sessions at New Webster, utilizing Webex for recording minutes to ensure accurate documentation. As the researcher, I also provided information regarding the security of recorded responses for a total of three years. Afterwards, all documents would be destroyed via a shredder and all audio and video files would be securely scrubbed by a UTS technology professional. I

also utilized our church security team members to provide the assurance that no harm would come to the women after dark in the rural area because some participants were coming straight from work. I provided a meal at all sessions. Security remained outside until sessions were over and participants were assisted to their vehicles. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was given a number that only the participant and the researcher knew. Questions for the pre- and post-questionnaire included:

1. What is gender discrimination?
2. What is a Concept Map?
3. What do you think is the most significant barrier to female leadership?
4. Who inspired you to be a leader?
5. When you began your career many years ago, did you ever imagine that you would have a leadership role? Yes _____ No _____
6. What barriers might impact a woman's ability to lead others?
7. Have you witness women in leadership experiencing resistance? Yes _____ No _____
8. Can women support other women in leadership? Yes _____ No _____

I utilized these methods as a means for:

- Self-Reflection: Journaling offered a safe space for participants to reflect on their experiences and emotions. Writing was about their interactions, thoughts, and feelings related to leadership, workplace dynamics, and gender. Participants identified instances where gender bias influenced their actions and/or perceptions — consciously or unconsciously; religiously or secularly.
- Personal Growth: Reflecting on the way biases impact their own lives, participants developed strategies to challenge biases, improve leadership practices, and promote inclusive environments.
- Emotional Growth: Journaling is a way to process frustrations and challenges that arise from gender bias. Writing about these experiences helped to validate feelings and empowered women to speak up about injustices as they identify steps for advocacy.

- **Increased Awareness:** Regular journaling encouraged mindfulness and self-awareness. Journaling helped researcher/participant recognize patterns in leadership roles, which can highlight subtle biases that they might not have been aware of before.
- **Anonymous Feedback:** Anonymous journaling allows participants to share experiences and opinions without fear of retribution. Anonymity helped gather honest, unfiltered feedback, which is critical for recognizing areas where gender bias may be ingrained in company culture.

Questionnaires and Concept Mapping Analysis Method Used:

- **Data Collection and Insight:** Questionnaires and concept maps provided a way to collect data on perceptions, experiences, and behaviors related to gender bias in ministry. By asking specific questions about bias in leadership, decision-making, or communication, questionnaires and concept maps reveal the prevalence and types of biases that exist, whether individuals are aware of them or not.
- **Identifying Patterns and Trends:** Questionnaires and concept maps were used to help identify systemic issues. This quantitative tool was used as a means for researcher's analysis of participants indication of witnessed and/or experienced gender biases.
- **Visual Clarity:** The concept map visually displayed quantitative systemic data of how society and the church are connected. (Identify triggers and track attitudes).

The name of the workshop is Sister-2-Sister Connection Circle. I chose that name for the workshop to usher in sisterhood and show unity. Because of the nature of the workshop, women only were invited to participate to ensure safety as well as to provide a safe space to openly speak on topics.

I, Reverend Pattie E. Gordon, served as facilitator/researcher because this project resonated with me deeply and because the participants are my members. The counselor used for this project, Reverend Kathy E. Shider, (MA, M. Ed, MDiv, GCDF), has been in the practice of this work for more than thirty years. During the sessions, there were women who shared their stories which triggered other members of the group. During the counseling moment Rev. Shider asked the women to breathe while explaining that it is

okay to acknowledge pain. She further shared that healing is a process and it begins with giving yourself permission to feel and be honest about where you are.

Implementation

The six-week project began on Thursday, February 06, 2025, with the final session on March 13, 2025. Each session began at 7:00 p.m. EST with a scheduled ending time of 8:30 p.m. However, most sessions lasted longer as the women were fully engaged and eager to voice their concerns and breakthroughs. Sessions were recorded via Webex for research purposes only. I facilitated all sessions. A certified counselor was available at each session in case of triggers and promote inclusivity. Each session was in person at New Webster United Methodist Church in Wadmalaw, South Carolina, and began with a centering moment and prayer followed by sharing of two words associated with their understand of gender bias to tract cognitive growth, presentation, wrap-up, and closing prayer. Each participant received a journal and was given a topic for journal entries for Tuesdays and Sundays. The study began with thirteen participants and ended with the same thirteen participants.

Only women, who were at least eighteen-years old, were eligible to participate. All women attended are members of The Johns Island Parish of The United Methodist Church (New Webster and Bethlehem St James). Of the participants, eleven hold leadership positions in the church, one is a supervisor on her secular job, and one was a young adult. Men were not allowed to participate so that women would be free to share their stories regarding gender biases in their local churches and communities.

Each participant was given a number as a means of identification throughout this study. Following are the participants, their identifiable numbers, and education levels:

- Number 1: High school graduate, lead choir member, associate advisor at the Food Pantry, retiree
- Number 2: College graduate with a master's and bachelor's degrees, church leader, educator, Divine 9, young adult
- Number 3: College graduate with a bachelor's degree, church leader, retiree
- Number 4: College graduate, church leader, retired educator, VBS Director, Divine 9
- Number 5: Associate degree, lay leader, certified lay speaker, office manager, VBS teacher, finance secretary, class leader, Bible Study teacher
- Number 6: High school graduate, superintendent church school, kitchen manager, church leader
- Number 7: College graduate, prayer ministry leader, supervisor
- Number 8: 8th grade education, retired lead cook, church leader
- Number 9: College graduate, supervisor
- Number 10: College graduate, lay leader, church leader, retired supervisor
- Number 11: MA degree, church leader, finance secretary
- Number 12: College graduate, finance chair, supervisor, UWF president, local lay servant
- Number 13: MBA and a Master of Accounting degrees, certified lay speaker, auditing & banking supervisor, church leader

As the facilitator, I led all six sessions drawing from my personal experiences with gender bias in the church.

Week One- February 6, 2025: "Discovering our Gifts and our ability to create pathways of women in leadership"

Thirteen participants were present. The session began with a centering moment and prayer from Participant 5. I introduced our workshop counselor, Reverend Kathy E. Shider. Each participant signed a confidentiality form as well as a workshop invite form, and everyone was given a pre-survey questionnaire to complete and turn in. Each participant received a concept mapping sheet to write two words on gender bias and a journal for weekly entries. I asked for permission to record the session for research information only. Each workshop began promptly at 7 p.m. EST. During the first session, I formally welcomed participants into this project and introduced myself as the primary researcher and I introduced our workshop counselor. I provided an overview of the project, why I chose this project, why I chose New Webster United Methodist Church in Wadmalaw, South Carolina, as the focus context, and how this project fits into my overall doctoral journey. Thirteen women participated in the first session. Though participants received and signed an Informed Consent Form (see Appendix B) during the first session, I emphasized that their participation was voluntary and confidential. To further assure them of the security of their written documentation and recordings via Webex, I read how the IRB process governed how data would be secured and destroyed after a period of three years. Lastly, I reiterated the data collection methods; concept map (See Appendix G), pre survey questionnaire (Appendix C), post-survey questionnaire (Appendix D), and journals as to how they would be utilized. I encouraged participants to engage in their journals on Tuesdays and Sundays each session as a means of capturing their initial thoughts, feelings, and opinions regarding the subject matter. The presentation began with me being open about my experiences as a pastor as well as said

concerns at The Johns Island Parish. My openness set the tone for not only the first session but for the entire six-week program.

I shared personal experiences to raise awareness and advocate for women leaders.

Participants engaged by sharing their stories.

- “I remember quitting my job because my manager asked me to train a white woman to take the floor supervisors job that came open. I was so hurt, so I asked him to give me a day to prepare and think. I came back to work that week and told him I quit.”
- “I remember an older woman in the church told me I was doing a great job as an aide at the elementary school. I felt so good about that that I decided I would take the teachers exam and become a teacher. That same lady scolded me and said that I should not do that because black people do not do well on the test. I remember walking away from her and saying to myself, I will take that test and I will pass it.”
- “I remember how we were taught what happens in this house, stays in this house. I now realize that no healing comes when you leave it in the house.”
- “Reverend Gordon thank you for thinking of me to attend this workshop. I am so thankful to all my sisters for sharing and helping me to open up about my concerns and realizing I that it has a name – gender bias- gender discrimination, which has contributed to my self-esteem problems.”

Our first session lasted two hours because of our sharing and positive interactions with one another. The counselor encouraged the participants to be careful because some of the women became emotional. She explained triggers and redirected our conversations.

Participants were reminded to complete their journal entries. We ended the session with a prayer from participant 10, and we enjoyed a meal together.

Week Two - February 13, 2025: Historical women preachers and movements- Sojourner Truth

We delved into the strength of activism and advocacy as we looked at historical women preachers and movements. I asked for permission to record the session for research information only. Twelve participants were present, and one participant was on our conference line due to night driving concerns. The session began with a centering moment and prayer from participant 8, and each participant added two words to their concept maps. We opened our session with a review of how we create pathways by discovering our gifts and recognizing our abilities. The women were also reminded of the importance of completing their journal entries each week.

Once again, participants were fully engaged in our discussions and these are just a few comments they made:

- “I can remember like yesterday the Orangeburg massacre. I still tear up when I go to games in Orangeburg, but the sit-in movement brought about change.”
- “I can remember my mom being empowered by Aretha Franklin’s “RESPECT” and I know I was empowered by Queen Latifa’s ‘U.N.I.T.Y.’”
- “I know Beyonce’s ‘Lemonade’ broke ceilings all over the world because it reminded us that no one is immune to oppression even with persons who supposed to love them.”
- “I know so many people both, male and female, who was able to breathe again after they became empowered by the #METOO movement.”
- “My granddaughter even speaking up following #BLACKGIRLSROCK movement and just seeing movies such as The Woman King and Black Panther. Her daughter is moved by ‘Moana, Princess and The Frog, and The Little Mermaid.’”
- “Thanks, Rev., for the reminders”

The session ended with a reminder for participants to complete their journal entries from the topic on our agenda. We closed with a prayer from participant 3 and a fellowship meal. The session was about an hour and forty-five minutes.

Week Three – February 20, 2025: A Wesleyan view of Social Holiness - We are in this together

This exercise allowed the participants to analyze the importance of testimonies and storytelling. I asked for permission to record the session for research information only. Twelve participants were present, and one participant was on our conference line due to night driving concerns. The session began with a centering moment and prayer from participant 11, and each participant added two words to their concept maps. We began with an understanding that social holiness is unique to United Methodists, and it reminds us that we must be in this together. When one person is oppressed, all of us are oppressed; when one race is discriminated upon, all races are discriminated upon because we live our lives together and we live our lives with all of God's creation. We walk with one another. We walk with those who are poor, those who are vulnerable, and those who live on the margins of life. Giving a voice to gender discrimination is a real reminder of the gift that God has given every human being. A common theme throughout the session from the participants was that while the United Methodist Church has made great strides towards gender equality, there is still a long road ahead. Once again, participants were fully engaged in our discussions and these are just a few comments they made:

- “I am still uneasy by the election of DT. No person of color should have voted for him.”
- “No woman should have voted for him, and I cannot understand any man with a mother, sister, or wife voting for him.”

- “His election showed how messed up the minds of people are. No Social Holiness with the shouts of deportation, immigrants, gays, and retribution.”

I reminded the group that thoughts like those shared is why we must raise awareness and help others see the beauty of human rights coupled with the need for liberation.

Following the presentation, I invited everyone to take a minute and breathe — to close their eyes and listen to the sound of the chime and remember God is still in control.

Participant 2 created a diagram with the words for our concept map. We saw growth from words associated with sexism, unfair and hatred moving towards wisdom, truth, and self-awareness. The session ended with a reminder to complete journal entries. The session lasted two hours. I thanked the participants for their continued commitment to the program, and participant 7 closed us in prayer and we shared a fellowship meal.

Week Four – February 27, 2025: Word Study from Judges 4:4-16. “Why Aint’t I woMAN Enough?”

Twelve participants were present, and one participant was on our conference line due to night driving concerns. asked for permission to record the session for research information only. The session began with a centering moment and prayer from participant 13, and each participant added two words to their concept maps. The session began at 7 p.m. and lasted one hour and twenty minutes The focus was on recognizing leaders like Deborah among the women at New Webster Church, who are strong, confident, and lead by the Spirit of God. It was important to create a safe space for them to express their views on salaries, conflict, emotions, and past hurts that will help them. These women of faith can lead without bias and teach others to encourage one another and participate positively. It was unnecessary to share or layout a comprehensive biblical

argument for women to serve as church leaders because generational and cultural mindsets would only instill more oppressive thoughts and bring with it more hurts. This platform was used as a place to begin to question why women are discouraged from serving in areas where we feel God's call in our lives. Our time together was used to bring confidence through understanding scripture that has been used to discourage women from serving in leadership roles in the church. This issue is complex, and scholars as well as church goers continue to condemn one another on the "what's" and "why's" of women in leadership. It is important to understand that leadership in the church entails service. The group appeared amazed by the strength, courage, and faith of Deborah. They were awe struck in learning that Deborah is one of the most influential women of the Bible and she is the only woman of the Old Testament who is known for her own faith and action. It is empowering and chilling to understand that Deborah is not validated or known because of her relationship to her husband or any other man. As a prophet and as a judge, Deborah was said to hear God's voice and share God's Word with others. Once again, participants were fully engaged in our discussions and these are just a few comments they made:

- Participant 4 shared how her granddaughter loves to hear me preach and how her son-in-love explained to his daughter that she can also do anything her little heart desires.

We ended with a reminder to keep journaling, and I asked how many participants felt that the journaling helps to relieve stress and gives clarity of thought? Eleven participants agreed that journaling has been a great way to relieve unhealthy thoughts and combat stressors. However, participant 3 stated that she "has never been a good writer and

journaling for her is a task, but she welcomes the idea of learning something new.”

Participant 3 then closed us in prayer and we shared a fellowship meal.

Week Five March 06, 2025: “Social Movements in Sociology”

Twelve participants were present, and one participant was on our conference line due to night driving concerns. I asked for permission to record the session for research information only. The session began with a centering moment and prayer from participant 9, and each participant added two words to their concept maps. The session began at 7 p.m. and lasted one hour and forty-five minutes.

We discussed how communal norms and values determine the roles that are defined for men and women. We discussed how different cultures have different ideas as to what is appropriate for males and females and how the socialization of males and females begins with birth and continues throughout life. Further discussion tapped into how societal and traditional expectations that are deeply rooted in cultural norms and beliefs significantly impact gender in society by shaping behaviors and by limiting opportunities based on gender. The group began reminiscing about their home life: “the girls were not allowed to spend nights away from home”; “brothers had to go with sisters on dates”; “boys were called to lead and get the good jobs”; and “boys were chosen as class president in school before even entertaining asking a girl to run.” I concluded this session by sharing how generational dynamics speaks clearly to the subject of gender biases and the work of women in the life of the church who have not been recognized for their spiritual gifts, passion, and inclusion for ministry. I shared how when the woman from South Carolina was elected bishop, she was not celebrated, not by the men and not

by the women. After much conversation, the participants stated how in New Webster they witnessed “men as lay leader, men as superintendent of church school, men leading devotion, men trustee chair and women usher chair, women stewardship chair, and women hospitality chair.” In the final portion of the session we discussed social movements that changed society and how disruptors voiced opposition of the status quo. I shared how conflict can shift power within the church and why women must join forces to advocate for change and not only rely on systems to fight. Regarding conflict, one participant 9 said, “she does not like or engage in conflict.” That is why she does not attend council meetings at church, and she extends greetings after service and makes her way to the door.” Our counselor shared that, “while conflict is not bad, we need to be careful of being nonresponsive because unresolved conflict is bad.” Participant 13 said, “that is so true because I have learned in and out of the church that change does not come until there is a revolt.” Participant 1 went on to say that “nothing will change until someone let their voice be heard; you have to speak up and say something if you really want change.” We discussed how the words on the concept map went from mainly negative words (hateful, discrimination, unfair, unequal, malice, overlooked) about what gender bias meant to calming words (hope, grace, trust, awareness, togetherness, strength). Session five ended with me reminding participants to keep journaling. We closed with a prayer from participant 6 and we shared a fellowship meal.

Week Six- March 13, 2025: Tools to connect – Making our Voices Heard

Thirteen participants were present. The session began with a centering moment and prayer from participant 4. I thanked the participants for their support and

commitment to our Sister 2 Sister Circle these past six weeks. Each participant received their concept map to share their final two words of their understanding of gender bias. The participants noted how the words transitioned from a state of defeat to a state of strength and empowerment. I then allowed time for participants to make any journal entries needed before handing them in to me. Participant 3 asked, “why I needed the journals?” I explained that the journals are for research purposes only. I assured them that no one other than myself will read their journals and I will only be looking for themes and patterns of difficult emotions and experiences and how the Sister 2 Sister Connection Workshop helped participants gain perspective and coping mechanisms. I presented each participant with a new journal and encouraged the sisters to continue journaling as a safe and private space to express themselves without judgement. I encouraged everyone to build on journaling as a means of practicing self-compassion. Participants began to share how journaling helped improve their self-esteem. Participants 3 and 12 shared that through journaling they were able to, “encourage themselves and that positive reinforcement really works.” Participant 11 said, “I used journaling to help me with emotional processing.” Participants 5 and 7 shared that they used journaling to help set goals and build their self-compassion.” Participant 8 said, “well as for me, I don’t care for writing because I can’t get my words right – I preferred talking with everyone.” Participants 10 and 13 said, “they were able to identify negative thought patterns and redirect.” I asked permission to record the session for research information only and participant 4 asked, “Rev. this evening, let’s just not record. Let’s just use this evening to bond without big sister.” The other participants agreed and there was no recording. Our final workshop began at 7 p.m. EST and lasted one hour and ten minutes. I began

reviewing the importance of the data and how it will be used in the overall dissertation's future endeavors relating to the topics discussed throughout our time together. I took a few minutes to review each week and allowed the participants to share information they learned during the week that positively or negatively impacted them. The following responses were shared:

- Week One, entitled “Discovering our Gifts and our ability to create pathways of women in leadership,” was used to carefully design and implement ways to address a specific need in the identified context. One participant said, “I love my church, and I have always felt that we were loving and kind to everyone but through this workshop, sadly, I was able to recognize that we, like so many other denominations we so easily name, can be extremely bias towards women, myself included.”
- Week Two, entitled “Historical Women Preachers and Movements - Sojourner Truth,” pointed out that support begins with the nuggets that God has already afforded us opportunities through employment offices, pulpits, usher boards, choirs, board rooms, and family gatherings. Seek and organize opportunities to truthfully share your story with others in prayer groups, sister circles, outings, family day, as well as on date night. Use your voice by advocating for change.
- Week Three was entitled “A Wesleyan view of Social Holiness - We are in this together.” We all agreed that the United Methodist Church has made great steps towards inclusion. Week three was designed to encourage participants by developing a model to actively advocate for the use of inclusive language and imagery, to move away from exclusive language, to build self-esteem. John Wesley taught that when a culture's vocation changes, it tends to generate a shift aimed towards broadening biblical understanding as it challenges traditional gender roles. Providing education and raising awareness will forge partnerships with communities and organizations. Participant 13 said she can see how this model offers opportunities for the need of skill building workshops and other programs designed build confidence and bridges while providing peer support to empower woman to become the needed advocates and activist for change.
- Week Four was titled “Word Study from Judges4:4-16 ‘Why Aint’t I woMAN Enough?’” While we all agreed that the Bible is a male-dominated book that reflects a male-dominated culture and even if we tried to separate Bible History from World History, we would continue to see that Human History is full of tales of testosterone-driven leaders. This makes it difficult to see the WOMAN LEADER. Nevertheless, I am empowered by the steps taken towards change. I shared that the story of Deborah gives light that God does not see a person's sex; God choose leaders by their Faith. Deborah's unwavering faith and trust in God

serves as a model for the Israelites as well as for us today as to the importance of relying on God in times of trouble and the faithfulness of God in fulfilling God's promises. One participant stated, "in this cruel and evil world, women of faith must seek to lead with the strength and wisdom of Deborah because others will follow."

- Week Five was entitled "Social Movements in Sociology." I reiterated the socialization process through which individuals learn and internalize gender roles and how societal norms dictate what is considered appropriate behavior for men and women which further contributes to and promote gender stereotypes and discrimination. I continued by reminding the women John Wesley's teachings of how social holiness is paired with sociology in that there can be no holiness that is not social, and we understand that sociology deals with the study of people. A major focus in sociology is how individuals interact with each other.

In my wrap up I shared the difference between feminist theology and womanist theology. Many of the participants found it interesting to know that feminist theology is a broad movement which examines religious traditions through a feminist lens, and it seeks to understand and dismantle patriarchal structures. The group was especially intrigued to know that womanist theology is a specific branch of feminist theology which addresses the unique forms of oppression faced by black women, particularly African American women, which includes issues stemming from racism, classism, and sexism. The pioneers of womanist theology are Jacquelyn Grant (my professor at ITC), Katie G. Cannon, Delores S. Williams, and Kelly Brown Douglas. I shared how the founders of womanist theology argued that they could not identify with the heroic male radicalism of Black liberation theology or the sisterhood-universalism of white feminist theology. They understood how race, class, and gender intersect to shape experiences of oppression.

I closed by sharing Dr. Jacquelyn Grant's teachings that both social theologians – womanist theologians and liberation theologians – and sociology contribute to a significant understanding of women in leadership by challenging traditional norms, advocating for inclusivity, and exploring the structural barriers that women face. The

participants understood and agreed with Grant's teaching in that of patriarchy, women's lives are carefully controlled and constrained so that, through socialization, human personality is guided along lines of sex category (the masculine and the feminine). A common theme throughout our group discussions from participants was the need to make our voices heard, starting in our homes and in our church, by bringing awareness to gender bias actions and talk. The final session ended with me reminding participants to continue to make time for journaling and in stressful moments take a minute to just breathe. I collected journals and picked up the completed post-survey questionnaires. I thanked each participant again for their love, support, and sisterhood. Participant 2 closed us in prayer; we hugged, cried tears of joy, and shared a fellowship meal.

Summary of Learning

The foundation for this project is my spiritual journey and pathway to healing from the discriminatory practices - societal inequalities and expectations - used to oppress and silence women. Session one, highlighted the synergy of New Webster church family and the impact of gender bias on women in leadership roles. Despite oppression and patriarchal systems, women are encouraged to confidently share their experiences and lead with dignity. The session acknowledged challenges such as scripture misinterpretations, cultural and generational beliefs, pay disparities, aloneness, self-esteem issues, patriarchal structures, and oppressed women becoming oppressors. The first session began with me sharing my story and why this project is important to me and others that have been subjected to unconscious biases and/or preconceived notions about someone based on personal or learned experiences. I led a conversation on discovering

our gifts and ability to be involved in creating pathways of women in leadership.

Participants received information about the individual chapters in my research project, an explanation of how they are related, and how they serve as the catalyst for the presentations.

The focus of session two was to challenge prevailing notions of racial and gender inferiority and inequality by reminding women participants of our combined strengths. Being a Black woman myself, I chose to utilize the teachings of Sojourner Truth and remind participants that women are not invisible no matter what one's conditions are in life. The goal was that women/men understand that Truth, a 19th century African American abolitionist and women's right activist, made extraordinary contributions to the struggles of gender equality despite her circumstances. Her advocacy continues to impact significantly on the fight for women's rights still today. Sojourner Truth's life and activism bring voice and awareness to my work in ministry and to other women who look like me to bring awareness to gender equality and justice for women. Truth's work transcends gender and racial equality in all walks of life. It lifts from the bottom up to give voice and bring change to the diverse experiences and challenges faced by women of different racial, ethnic, and social-economic backgrounds. This work enables Black female leaders to rise to the top and bring change to the movement. To demonstrate that gender discrimination in leadership is not new for women of faith, I focused on pioneering figures like Barbara Heck, Sojourner Truth, Fanny Crosby, Harriet Tubman, and Mary McLeod Bethune. These nineteenth-century women preachers of faith were instrumental in addressing biases and promoting social change through movements. By examining the women's rights movement, the antebellum period, and the suffrage

movement, I explored their struggles and how they navigated patriarchal systems in their communities, religious denominations, local churches, and society.

My selected topic for the third session teaching was from my Theological Foundations chapter on Social Holiness. John Wesley believed that holiness cannot be separated from social action. This further helps us understand that the Christian faith must be a “lived” reality of love, service, and justice within our churches. This concept encompasses engaging in acts of mercy, advocating for justice, and undertaking efforts to address systemic injustices that perpetuate inequality and oppression.

During the fourth session, I led a word study from Judges 4:4-16, entitled, “Why ain’t I woMAN enough?” Deborah’s story is a proponent of women’s leadership in church and society. This scripture was the basis for my Biblical Foundations chapter and allowed me to carefully analyze it while empowering women leaders to understand that God can and God will use anyone to get God’s job done because cultural biases does not exist in the eyes of God, but only in the eyes of those who continue to stifle the growth of women in leadership, women in the pulpits, women as college and university presidents, and women as president of the United States of America. If God did it for Deborah, God will certainly do it for women everywhere and in spaces everywhere, even in our hearts and minds. An understanding that Deborah faced trials with a steadfast commitment, courageous heart, and confident faith were pivotal talking points.

Several of the participants shared that they rarely hear sermons or teachings from the Book of Judges, and they may have heard a speaker at a Women’s Conference speak about Deborah when sharing several other strong women of the Bible. Deborah’s story was shared to inform the participants that God used ordinary people to do extraordinary

things that can only be accomplished through the Spirit, and God does not choose any person based solely on gender.

Social movements in sociology were the foci of our fifth session. We discussed how movements challenge systemic societal injustices from my Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter. We discussed Karl Marx's ideas that asserts that concentrated power leads to inherent inequalities, which are only addressed through conflict. This session was aligned with the Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter in my doctoral thesis. I used this session to define sociology, address communal factors, explore traditional influences, and review generational dynamics of sociology against the backdrop of exploring the concept of conflict theory as espoused by Karl Marx. In examining these movements, we observe how models that drive radical initiatives address systemic injustices within religious contexts, specifically focusing on leadership roles within Black Methodist churches. I initiated the session by recounting stories about my mother, my auntie, and women in my home church. I provided a definition of Social Conflict Theory as outlined in the Interdisciplinary Foundations chapter of this thesis. The presentation was supported by real-life inequities that affect women throughout their lives. A key example involved sharing experiences regarding the challenges faced by members in my previous appointments, including The Johns Island Parish, in addressing me as Reverend or Pastor Gordon. I shared that every Sunday morning, someone refers to me as Mrs. Minister, or Sister Gordon. I explained how hurtful that is to me, being their pastor for seven years. I further shared how I attend funerals at different churches and the officiating male welcomes all the males in the pulpit as reverend and when he introduces me, I am Sister Gordon.

In our wrap up I shared that womanist theologians, such as Jacquelyn Grant, Emilie Townes, Alice Walker, Toni Morrison, and Katie Cannon, advocate for an intersectional approach, recognizing that gender is not experienced in isolation but is intertwined with other social identities like race and class. This means that women of color experience different forms of oppression and have distinct needs and priorities compared to white women. It is imperative to recognize that womanist theologians critique conventional theological interpretations which may be influenced by patriarchal or Eurocentric viewpoints. Womanist theologians provide alternative perspectives on God, scripture, and religious institutions that better correspond with the lived experiences and spiritual requirements of Black women. My hope is that this work will help emphasize the importance of Black women's survival and self-love in the face of oppression. This includes recognizing their strength, resilience, and the unique ways in which they have navigated and resisted systemic injustices in the church, the home, and the workplace.

Over the six weeks, thirteen women participated in the Sister 2 Sister Connection Circle Workshop exploring gender bias. The Sister 2 Sister summary chart shows that 80% did not understand gender bias within the church (see Appendix J). I found it interesting that the youngest participant recognized gender biases in her family, on her job, and in her church while the older participants could not see it. By the closing of the session, 97% had a clearer understanding of gender biases, proving the group's effectiveness as shown in the bar graph of the Pre- and Post-Survey Questionnaires (see Appendix I). It is vital to continue policies and practices on gender bias both inside and

outside the church to promote inclusion, support leadership progression for underrepresented genders, and encourage discussions about gender incidents.

Following the explanation of my doctoral research, I explained the Internal Review Board (IRB) process that governs the way I approach the research, the security of said data, and the integrity of the research. All participants understood the process and were eager to start. All of the participants had been or are presently leaders in the church and on their jobs outside of the church. I emphasized the importance of each participant's commitment to confidentiality to ensure that each woman could share without any constraints or judgement.

Finally, I assured participants that the goal of this research project and the training sessions was to provide them with models of what it means to use their voices and skills to unify and liberate as they advocate for change and strengthen "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" (DEI) efforts to liberate and empower women and other marginalized groups. Otherwise, the glass ceiling may persist and negatively affect the church as well as company cultures.

The questionnaires, concept mapping, and journaling proved that participants agree that gender equality makes personal and leadership development stronger and more sustainable. They also showed that gender equality is not only a pressing moral and social issue but also a critical economic challenge as women account for half the world's working-age population. Therefore, gender equality is of utmost importance as it is a fundamental human right and a necessary foundation for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world.

The Sister 2 Sister Connection Workshop with a focus on addressing gender bias for women leaders in ministry is essential as it provides the space to confront unique challenges that female leaders face within religious or spiritual communities. These challenges range from unconscious bias and stereotypes to systemic inequalities that impact women's advancement, recognition, and leadership opportunities in faith-based settings.

This project is a clarion call to religious communities that the church needs more Deborahs. Churches need godly, strong women to step up and use the gifts God has given them. We need Deborahs in the workplaces, to provide diverse perspectives and challenge the status quo. We need Deborahs in the home, speaking courage into their family's lives. We need Deborahs in ministry to inspire, give, pray, go, and sacrifice. We need Deborahs in society, to foster a more inclusive environment that leads with wisdom, courage, and faith.

Throughout history, Christians have generally believed that men and women are equal with respect to dignity and worth and yet different with respect to role and responsibility. The church believe that men have a specific stewardship regarding Word ministry and women have a specific stewardship with respect to nurturing and raising children. In the Bible those roles are treated as equally valuable and necessary for the health and flourishing of God's people. The story of Deborah challenges the essence of the role of women in leadership. Judges 4:4 states that, "Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time"

This makes it clear that women can be prophetesses as well as leaders. Deborah's courage is legendary; her confidence did not come from her abilities or Israel's army. In

fact, the armies of Israel were largely outnumbered by Sisera and his many chariots. But where Sisera trusted in the might of his army, Deborah trusted in God's power and provision (Psalms 20:6-9).

The Sister 2 Sister Connection Circle six-week workshop showed significant growth in understanding gender bias from pre- to post-session (see Appendix I). It covered key points about how gender bias is accepted and weaponized in society and the church. Participants gained a better grasp of Concept Maps, demonstrating that visual displays help understand attitudes and behaviors. The questionnaire helped participants recognize their leadership potential, moving from vague awareness to specific realizations about leadership, bias, and personal empowerment. However, the most important aspect of learning came as participants were able to recognize through stories and personal occurrences that gender bias is not just outside the walls of New Webster United Methodist Church. Participants found it challenging to acknowledge the presence of gender biases in both historical and contemporary leadership roles. There remains a significant barrier to women attaining leadership positions within the church, home, and workplace.

The Sister 2 Sister Connection Circle Workshop benefited the Johns Island Parish Family. The workshops educated participants about subtle ways gender bias manifest in church settings, such as.

- Unequal Leadership Opportunities
- Limited Leadership Roles for Women
- Unintentional Microaggressions

- Generational Teachings
- Cultural Understandings

The Sister 2 Sister Connection Circle Workshop opened the door for real discussions concerning what gender bias looks like in the church. The conversations unearthed issues that women in leadership must contend with such as unequal leadership (women denied certain positions or nominated for less prominent roles), unequal pay (women paid less than men for the same position), gender expectations (hospitality chair, nurture chair, usher president), microaggressions (unintentional comments, demean women contributions, hostile workplaces) and underrepresentation (in leadership roles and/or speaking opportunities).

The Sister 2 Sister Connection Workshop provided tools for constructive conversations on gender issues, identifying gender terminology, and addressing biases. Over six weeks, it created a space for women to share experiences, promoted diversity and inclusion, and empowered participants to advocate for their own needs and those of others. It opened the door for real change. The Sister 2 Sister Connection Workshop created a model for effective change - by raising awareness (of their own as well as others), by providing education and tools for recognizing and mitigating biases, by facilitating behavioral change (willingness to challenge biases and engage in inclusive practices), and by fostering a more diverse and inclusive workplace culture where everyone can feel valued and respected.

Conclusion

Developing Leadership Principles Model for Women presents a compelling and urgent call to address gender bias within Christian ministry, particularly in the context of the New Webster United Methodist Church. This project is deeply rooted in my personal experiences as an African American clergy woman sharing historical context of gender discrimination and biblical exegesis delving into the authority and power of God to use any one at any time. This project provides a well-rounded exploration of the systemic barriers women face in church leadership. Importantly, the project aligns with core tenets of womanist theology, which seeks to center lived experiences of Black women, challenge intersecting oppressions and promote liberation and empowerment within theological discourse. This project effectively embodies the principles of womanist theology by centering the lived experiences of Black women in ministry, particularly within the Black church context, by addressing both gender and racial biases. It highlights the intersectionality of oppression — an essential component of womanist analysis.

The recent defeat of Kamala Harris in the 2024 presidential election has left many Black women grappling with a profound sense of pain, anger, and betrayal. Despite the hopes and aspirations placed on her historic candidacy, the election results highlighted a stark reality: a significant portion of white women voters once again supported DT. This outcome has not only challenged the faith in humanity of many Black women but has also deepened the rift between black women and their white female counterparts. Nevertheless, as Black women gathered to forge a Circle Connection to move from brokenness to wholeness, we found strength to get pass decades of hurts and wounds

from essays in Emilie Maureen Townes book, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, as we shared testimonies and stories of “how we have overcome.” I shared from Townes’ essay entitled “The Site of Memory.”

Townes shared how Morrison’s essay⁵ helped her to introduce several major themes of the chapter and the book as a whole: imagination, history, the fantastic, the power of images, and memory. In the essay Morrison begins her discussion with slave narratives that, she notes, say two things: ‘This is my historical life - my singular, special example that is personal, but it also represents the race’ and ‘I write this text to persuade other people – you, the reader who is probably not black - that we are human beings worthy of God’s grace and the immediate abandonment of slavery.’⁶

We were overcome with floods of emotions of our heritage and then our scars today. There was and is a reckoning that too often the oppression comes back in full circle, ravaging our thoughts, tearing away at our hopes, and dragging away our dreams. Yet, we (Black women) have always mustered up the strength from likeminded encouragers as shared by participant 11. She reminded us of Queen Latifah’s Hip Hop single released November 9, 1993 entitled *U.N.I.T.Y.* Participant 11 shared some of the lyrics and how those lyrics helped her move through oppressive moments she endured while leading in the church and supervising on her job. This moment helped others to understand the importance of the power of understanding that we are stronger together than we are apart. This speaks to the Johns Island Parish Mission Statement: “We are ONE church with

⁵ Toni Morrison, “The Site of Memory,” *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir*, ed. William Zinser (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 85-102.

⁶ Emilie Maureen Townes, *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 11.

TWO locations where we, ‘Glorify God by making disciples of Jesus Christ through genuine love and outward ministry for all God’s children.’”⁷

The Sister 2 Sister Connection Workshop is a bold and necessary intervention in the ongoing struggle for gender equality in Christian ministry. It blends theological reflection, personal testimony, and practical methodology to create a compelling argument for women’s leadership in the church. By incorporating womanist theology, the project not only critiques gender bias but also offers a model for empowerment and communal resilience. However, there are areas for refinement particularly in comparative analysis, engagement with opposing views, and long-term implementation. The project stands as an important contribution to both academic and ecclesial discussions on gender justice and Black women’s leadership in ministry.

Regarding the project goals and purpose, an effective theological project should include the following:

1. A Clear Purpose: The project should have a well-defined purpose that aligns with the mission and vision of the church.
2. Spiritual Growth Foci: Goals should focus on fostering spiritual growth such as increased participation in Bible study, prayer groups, and discipleship programs.
3. Inclusion of Outreach and Evangelism: Goals should include plans for community outreach and evangelism.
4. Promote Leadership Development: The project’s aim should be geared towards developing leadership skills to serve effectively in communities.
5. Evaluation and Reflection: There should be mechanisms for evaluating the project’s impact and reflecting on its outcomes to ensure continuous improvement.

⁷ JIP Administrative Council Meeting held August 19, 2019, 7pm at New Webster United Methodist Church, Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina. Adopted, 34 persons in attendance.

In terms of good practices, consider the following:

1. Inclusion: Ensure that the project is inclusive and considers the diverse needs and perspectives of all participants.
2. Sustainability: Plan for sustainability of the project ensuring that it can continue to have a positive impact beyond its initial implementation. (Ongoing policies — bias awareness leadership training)
3. Documentation: Keep thorough records of the project's progress and outcomes which can be used for future reference and to share best practices with others.

The inclusion of womanist theology scholars such as Jacquelyn Grant, Emile Townes, Katie Cannon, Delores Williams, and Kelly Douglas strengthens the argument for reinterpreting the role of women in ministry.

The Sister 2 Sister Connection Circle Workshop focused on bringing awareness to gender biasness for women leaders in ministry. The workshops were essential because it provided the space to confront unique challenges that female leaders face within religious, spiritual, and secular communities. These challenges ranged from unconscious bias and stereotypes to systemic inequalities that impact women's advancement, recognition, and leadership opportunities in faith-based settings. The primary goals of the Sister 2 Sister Connection Workshop were to:

- Raise awareness about gender bias in ministry.
- Empower women leaders to identify and challenge gender bias within their churches or religious organizations.
- Equip women with practical tools for advocacy and creating inclusive environments.
- Encourage leadership development and confidence in confronting institutional and cultural biases.

Each nightly session was used to evaluate if the workshop effectively addressed the specific challenges these diverse women face, considering denominational background

differences, cultural and generational diversity, and varying levels of ministry leadership experience, and educational understandings.

Session One of the Project addressed personal and contextual relevance as firsthand experiences of the struggles and hurts of a female in a male dominated profession. It was also used to provide authenticity and emotional depth to the project. Reflections on discrimination within the church and the broader society demonstrated a compelling narrative element of a bonding point with the women in the study and the focus was on Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina. This provided evidence of how a localized case study can be utilized to highlight the intersection of race, culture, and gender in the Black church.

Sessions three and four gave depth to the fact that “WE ARE IN THIS TOGETHER” with the ability to share testimonies of our suffrage in the Church as we strive to share God’s Words that embodies the Wesleyan principle of Social Holiness (Theological Foundation) as well as the biblical aspect of the fact that God does not place leaders based on skill, but on their character. Yes, God uses ordinary people. The project effectively employs scriptural analysis, particularly through the story of Deborah in Judges 4:4-16 to challenge patriarchal interpretations of leadership.

Sessions two and five delved into historical and social movements which opened the door of past and current outspoken sojourners to address the invisibleness of women in the church. Session six undergirds the tools to connect and understand the power of language and the need to make our voices heard as we shine a spotlight on gender discrimination as we advocate for change.

The Sister 2 Sister project was to design a Women's Circle of Healing to address the growing need of breaking barriers (glass ceilings) of women in leadership. The workshop clearly acknowledged that women have contributed much to the ministry of New Webster United Methodist Church family and communities throughout its 141-year history. However, the role of women in church leadership on Wadmalaw Island has never been free from controversy. This Sister 2 Sister Project opened the door for New Webster women to discuss the barriers faced by women in ministry leadership as well as in secular leadership along with societal norms and generational beliefs of how women should seek to lead and in what positions women are better suited for in cultural understandings.

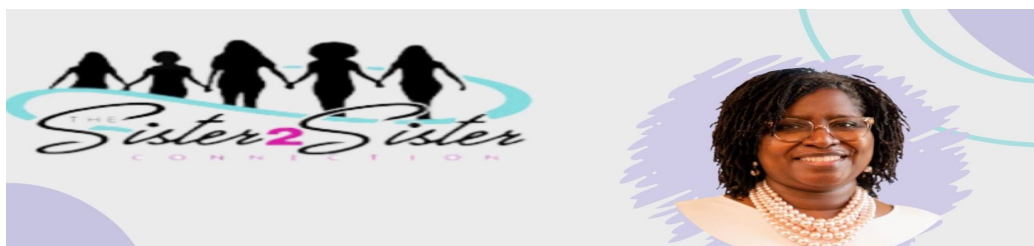
Crucial to these discussions for many of women was the matters of faithful biblical interpretation, acknowledging barriers, identifying those barriers, and addressing ways to advocate for change. Just as little Black girls need to see themselves as princesses in stories, they need to see how they can also grow up from fairy tales and become strong women who lead with dignity, voice, and strength.

Journaling and questionnaires allow participants to introspect and build personal awareness of gender biases, while concept mapping offered a way to capture and analyze broader trends and experiences of women in leadership/ministry. The Sister 2 Sister Connection Circle Workshop's concept mapping results showed that most participants associated gender biases with hate which indicates a strong association between the concept of gender bias and negative emotions or attitudes. Together, these tools provide valuable insights that are essential for addressing and mitigating gender bias in leadership.

This gender bias workshop measured the progression towards gender equality of conscious and unconscious biases across various religious and secular sectors. It opened conversations, healed wounds, and discussed factors that impact opportunities and advancement for individuals based on their gender. This research examined the effectiveness of raising awareness of implicit biases and equipped participants with strategies to mitigate them in their professional interactions, focusing on target population, e.g., ministry, educators, healthcare professionals, first responders, athletes, or managers in a specific industry. The study assessed changes in participants' attitudes, beliefs, and behavioral intentions towards gender equality and provided valuable insights for developing effective interventions to address gender bias in the workplace. These women came to an understanding that being overlooked, dismissed, or undervalued simply because they/we are women can chip away at our self-esteem and make us question our place in the world. Therefore, it is vital to network with others as a voice bringing awareness while advocating for change and reminding yourself that YOU ARE ENOUGH!

APPENDIX A

EVENT FLYER AND INVITATION LETTER



Sister2Sister Connection

Circle Journey

Six (6) Week Sister-2-Sister Connection Circle seeks to encourage WOMEN to build communities in which similarly positioned women can discuss their feedback, compare notes, and emotionally support one another's learning.

Join us for prayer, bible study, journaling, reflection, and target sessions

TOPICS WE'LL COVER

- Gender Bias
- Inclusive Leadership
- Leadership Stereotypes
- Systemic Societal Injustices
- Community Improvement

WE ENCOURAGE WOMEN TO:

Take Risks

Be Vulnerable

Talk Openly

Discover

Heal

SESSIONS WILL BE HELD:

February 6 | February 13 | February 20 | February 27 | March 6 | March 13
7:00 PM

New Webster United Methodist Church
4755 Bears Bluff Road
Wadmalaw Island, South Carolina 29487

January 15, 2025

Greetings Women of Faith:

I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio. I am conducting a six-week research study based upon my doctoral dissertation, "Developing Leadership Principles for Women: Acknowledging, Identifying, and Addressing Gender Biases." After successfully passing my Candidacy Review, December 10, 2024, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted me permission to implement my final project.

In this regard, you are invited to participate in my research study as potential participants with an expressed interest in this research. The goal of the six-week program, "Sister-2-Sister Connection Circle," is a path to healing and wholeness because self-discovery is best served with tenderness and sweet curiosity. Participation in this study is Black women who attend New Webster United Methodist Church. (Please be advised that no men are involved in this study to provide open conversation.) Participants must be eighteen years of age or older, who currently hold leadership positions in and out of the church, or who holds a position in the church but has never held a leadership position outside of the church. Women who are pregnant or become pregnant during this research period may do so with a written statement from her doctor stating she is under medical care and that the doctor has no objection to her participation in the study. If needed, study details will be provided to the woman for her doctor to review.

For my action research project, I have chosen to host Empowerment Circle Sessions weekly on Thursday's beginning, February 06, 2025, through March 13, 2025. Each session will be from 7 p.m. EST to 8:30 p.m. EST. Each session will be held in-person and recorded for project purposes via Webex (a private Zoom room) for project purposes as well as for any health concerns that may arise. Webex participants should be alone in a secure area to maintain privacy and confidentiality of all participants.

Your participation in this research study is voluntary. The information and data collected from you will be used solely for the purpose of this doctoral study to fulfill degree requirements and will not be shared or distributed beyond the scope of the study. No identifiable information will be included in the final project. Data will be analyzed to determine the effectiveness of the project and reported in the final project published research document.

Attached to this written invitation letter is an informed consent form that you will need to sign and return to me no later than the first project module on Thursday, February 06, 2025, if you choose to participate. Signing the informed consent form means that you have read the information fully or had it read to you and that you want to participate in the study. If you do not want to participate in the study, do not sign this form. Again, your participation is voluntary. Signing the consent form means that you have been informed about this study, the purpose of this study, and expectations from your participation.

In closing, I look forward to your continued support in this final stage of my doctoral program. If you would like more information or have questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (404) 387-9514 or by email at pegordon1@united.edu.

Blessings and Peace,

Reverend Pattie E. Gordon, Candidate for the Doctor of Ministry Degree,
Class of 2026 Rooted: Anchored for Catalyzing Change
Dr. Vance Ross, Mentor
Dr. Lillian Smith, Mentor

APPENDIX B
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

United Theological Seminary
INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Investigator Name: Pattie E. Gordon
Contact Information: pegordon1@united.edu

Introduction: I am a doctoral student at United Theological Seminary in Dayton, Ohio.

Purpose: I am conducting a study to bring awareness to gender biases. Developing Leadership Principles for Women; Acknowledging, Identifying and Addressing Gender Biases

Requirements for Participation: You are invited because you are a member of New Webster United Methodist Church who currently hold a leadership position inside or outside of the Church.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in the study, you will be asked to: attend 6 sessions held on Thursdays at 7-8:30pm nightly. Participants will attend in-person (New Webster's Fellowship Hall) or via Webex, be courteous others, adhere to confidentiality of participants, participate in centering circles, complete pre and post questionnaires, voluntarily share leadership experiences as well as participate in a group Bible Study.

Human Subject participation:

All the participants must have consented to be in the study, and participants must be protected and treated fairly throughout the study. For example, children who are under 18 years old must have permission from their parents/ guardians. And for women who are pregnant or may become pregnant during the study, they must provide a doctor's note for their safety, since they are considered a protected class (i.e., vulnerable population) by the Federal Law.

Risks:

Due to the nature of this study, there are spiritual and emotional risks associated with matters of faith, religious practices, and theological and cultural beliefs. Immediate risks may include feelings associated with anger, guilt, shame, confusion, and shattered assumptions. Also, associated previous trauma from lived experiences based upon topics of discussion may present emotional distress from feelings associated with low self-esteem, unworthiness, inadequacies, challenges to theological beliefs, cultural beliefs, and religious morals and values. In the event of accidental data disclosure, there may be legal, financial, social, or personal implications. In addition, I, the researcher, will abide by my state's mandatory reporting laws.

Benefits:

It is my hope that this research stirs up women who have been called to lead but experience rejection because of their gender. This research should compel others to work towards bridging the gap regarding gender biases and bring to light the conscious and

unconscious prejudices against women leaders to offer resources to advocate for reflective change. A life and faith change to help bring awareness to gender biases and help to circumvent structure inequalities, systems, and practices that seek to silence women, who lead.

Voluntariness:

Participation is voluntary and you may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. You can also stop participating at any time. Your decision to participate will have no impact on your membership in the congregation or whatever else you think this study may have an impact upon. If something makes you feel uncomfortable in any way while you are in the study, please contact me directly in person, on the phone, or electronic communication. My contact information is at the top of this consent form. You can refuse to respond to any or all of the questions, and you will be able to withdraw from the process at any time.

Confidentiality:

I will be careful to keep your information confidential, and I will ask you and all the focus group leaders to keep the discussion confidential as well. There is always a small risk of unwanted or accidental disclosure. The conversations and the focus groups will be recorded and transcribed only with your permission. Any notes, recordings, or transcriptions will be kept private. I will be the only one with access to your information. The files will be encrypted, and password protected. You can decide whether you want your name used via Webex which will be used for persons unable to join in-person. It is up to you to decide if you want to be on the camera at any time.

Summary:

If you have any questions about the research study, please contact me, Rev. Pattie E. Gordon, at (404)387-9514 or pegordon1@united.edu. Remember, this consent form along with the welcome letter must be signed and returned to me either in-person or by email no later than February 06, 2025. Many thanks for your interest and consideration of participating in this study.

Signature:

Signing this paper means that you have read this, or had it read to you, and that you want to be in the study. If you do not want to be in the study, do not sign the paper. Being in the study is up to you, and no one will be mad if you do not sign this paper or even if you change your mind later. You agree that you have been told about this study and why it is being done and what to do.

Signature of Person Agreeing to
Participate in the Project/Study

Date Signed

APPENDIX C
PRE-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Pre-Survey Questionnaire

1. What is gender discrimination?
2. What is a Concept Map?
3. What do you think is the most significant barrier to female leadership?
4. Who inspired you to be a leader?
5. When you began your career many years ago, did you ever imagine that you would have a leadership role? Yes _____ No _____
6. What barriers might impact a woman's ability to lead others?
7. Have you witness women in leadership experiencing resistance? Yes _____ No _____
8. Can women support other women in leadership? Yes _____ No _____

APPENDIX D
POST-SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

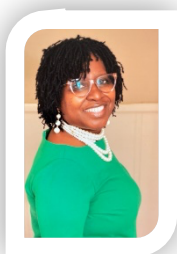
Post-Survey Questionnaire

1. What is gender discrimination?
2. What is a Concept Map?
3. What do you think is the most significant barrier to female leadership?
4. Who inspired you to be a leader?
5. When you began your career many years ago, did you ever imagine that you would have a leadership role? Yes _____ No _____
6. What barriers might impact a woman's ability to lead others?
7. Have you witness women in leadership experiencing resistance? Yes _____ No _____
8. Can women support other women in leadership? Yes _____ No _____

APPENDIX E

SISTER 2 SISTER WORKSHOP AGENDA

Sister 2 Sister Connection 6 Week Workshop



A Model for Women to Acknowledge, Identify and Address Gender Biases.

Take a moment of personal expression!

1. To Just Breathe and
2. A beginning process to Name your Pain
3. Consent forms are attached and must be returned by January 25, 2025

Remember, this is not an experiment or test. This is a path to healing and wholeness – self-discovery is best served with tenderness and sweet curiosity.

Session One



- Centering Moment and Prayer (5 Minutes)
- Completion of Pre-Survey (20 Minutes)
- Share 2 Words associated with your understanding of Gender Bias (Concept Map to track cognitive growth/understanding-measure theory) (5 Minutes)
- Discovering our Gifts and our ability to be involved in creating pathways of women in leadership (The Synergy of the New Webster Family and how the factors of gender biasness have contributed to more complex concerns for women who seek to lead) (1 hour)
- Journal for 15 minutes on Tuesday as you reflection on and identify your unconscious Biases (those hidden biases that influence your behavior and decision making)
- Journal for 15 minutes on Sunday on what it means to be in community with others -

Session Two

- Centering Moment and Prayer (5 Minutes)
- Share 2 Words associated with your understanding of Gender Bias (Concept Map)
- Historical Women preachers and Movements- Sojourner Truth (The strength of an activism and advocacy) (1 hour and 20 minutes)
- Journal for 15 minutes on Tuesday as you reflection on practical strategies to mitigate biases (actionable strategies to reduce the impact of biases in everyday decision making)
- Journal for 15 minutes on Sunday on unseen Barriers of gender bias in the Church.



1.

Session Three

- Centering Moment and Prayer (5 Minutes)
- Share 2 Words associated with your understanding of Gender Bias (Concept Map)
- Wesleyan View of Social Holiness- We are in this together- Suffrage in the Church storytelling and testimonies (1 hour and 20 minutes)

- **Journal for 15 minutes on Tuesday as you reflection on the meaning for followers of Christ to offer Grace and Love when you feel invisible**
- **Journal for 15 minutes on Sunday as you reflection on tools to advocate and bring awareness to biases in the Church**

Session Four

- **Centering Moment and Prayer (5 Minutes)**
 - **Share 2 Words associated with your understanding of Gender Bias (Concept Map 5 Minutes)**
 - **Word Study- Judges 4:4-16 Deborah's story as proponents of women's leadership in church and society- Why ain't I woMAN Enough (1 hour and 25 minutes)**
 - **Journal for 15 minutes on Tuesday on ways to recognize hidden biases and improve community to build a more inclusive leadership team.**
 - **Journal for 15 minutes on Sunday on gender stereotypes in the Bible**
- 2.

Session Five

- **Centering Moment and Prayer (5 Minutes)**
- **Share 2 Words associated with your understanding of Gender Bias (Concept Map 5 Minutes)**
- **Social movements in sociology and how these movements challenge systemic societal injustices (1 hour and 20 minutes)**
- **Journal for 15 minutes on Tuesday on ways we bring awareness to social dynamics of gender discrimination.**
- **Journal for 15 minutes on Sunday on a social movement and the effects it played/plays on society in gender bias.**

Session Six

- **Centering Moment and Prayer (5 Minutes)**
- **Share 2 Words associated with your understanding of Gender Bias (Concept Map 5 Minutes)**
- **Wrap up/tools to connect and understand the power of language- Making our Voices Heard (1 Hour)**
- **5 Minute journaling on Gender Stereotypes of Church Leadership positions at New Webster**
- **Completion of Post Survey (20 Minutes)**
- **Closing Evaluation (10 Minutes)**

Typically, gender bias refers to the preferential treatment given to men — specifically white, heterosexual men. It is often labeled as sexism and describes the prejudice against women solely on the basis of their sex. Gender bias is most prominently visible within professional settings.

Gender equality means that everyone's rights, opportunities, and responsibilities are not dependent on their gender. When women's voices are not heard, it can lead to gender inequality and harm to women and girls. To achieve gender equality, it's important to increase women's representation and leadership in all areas of life. Here are some examples of efforts to make women's voices heard

APPENDIX F
WORD STUDY

SISTER-2-SISTER CONNECTION THROUGH WORD STUDY

Session 4 February 27, 2024

Why are We Still Not Woman Enough for the Church/to Lead! Women's Private Relationships, Personal Responsibilities, Public Ridicule and Professional Roles!



Main Text; Judges 4:4-16

Other Text for Review

I. Private Relationships- Many times personal feelings about women were used to exploit them, and they were called on to do more for the nation of Israel out of guilt than men were. Their actions were not seen as heroic but a sense of their national duty, while the actions of men were seen as heroic even if less significant. Often even marriage was used as contracts to prevent war or settle disputes from a tribal level to the national level. Their private lives were not their own but belonged to the community of Israel and could be used by husband, fathers, brothers and even widowed mother for the benefit of family, tribe or nation. While often held in higher value than the heathen woman in the lands that Israel occupied, that value was for the use of family they themselves rarely if ever increased their wealth or used to enrich their lives or social status unless they like Abigail employed cunningness and ingenuity to preserve and protect them and their children.

- a) Often time the Private affairs of women leaders are on display,
- b) Society and men in particular fear female leaders that cannot be brought, sold, controlled, blackmailed, or used as a scapegoat

II. Personal Responsibilities- Women in Leadership are often required to accept and meet with perfection the varied responsibilities of being a domesticated blue-collar worker with front office expertise all while breast feeding and educating the future male leaders of the nation. It is personal in that they owned it and then like now make it personal to perform above their pay grade without the gratification of celebration for a job well done.

III. Public Ridicule- Women even in Leadership even in the Hebrew Biblical text weather as a community or individuals were not without being ridiculed in public spaces, by other women, when doing what was commanded of them and certainly by men.

IV. Professional Roles- The roles of women in the life of Israel varied depending on the Spiritual, physical, geographical, emotional, financial, and political state of Israel. This is when Deborah emerges when Israel is dislocated and seeking its place in the Fertile

Crescent and needed to situate and establish itself in all these areas Judges4:1-5:31. She is a Woman, warrior, wife, mother, judge, and prophetess.

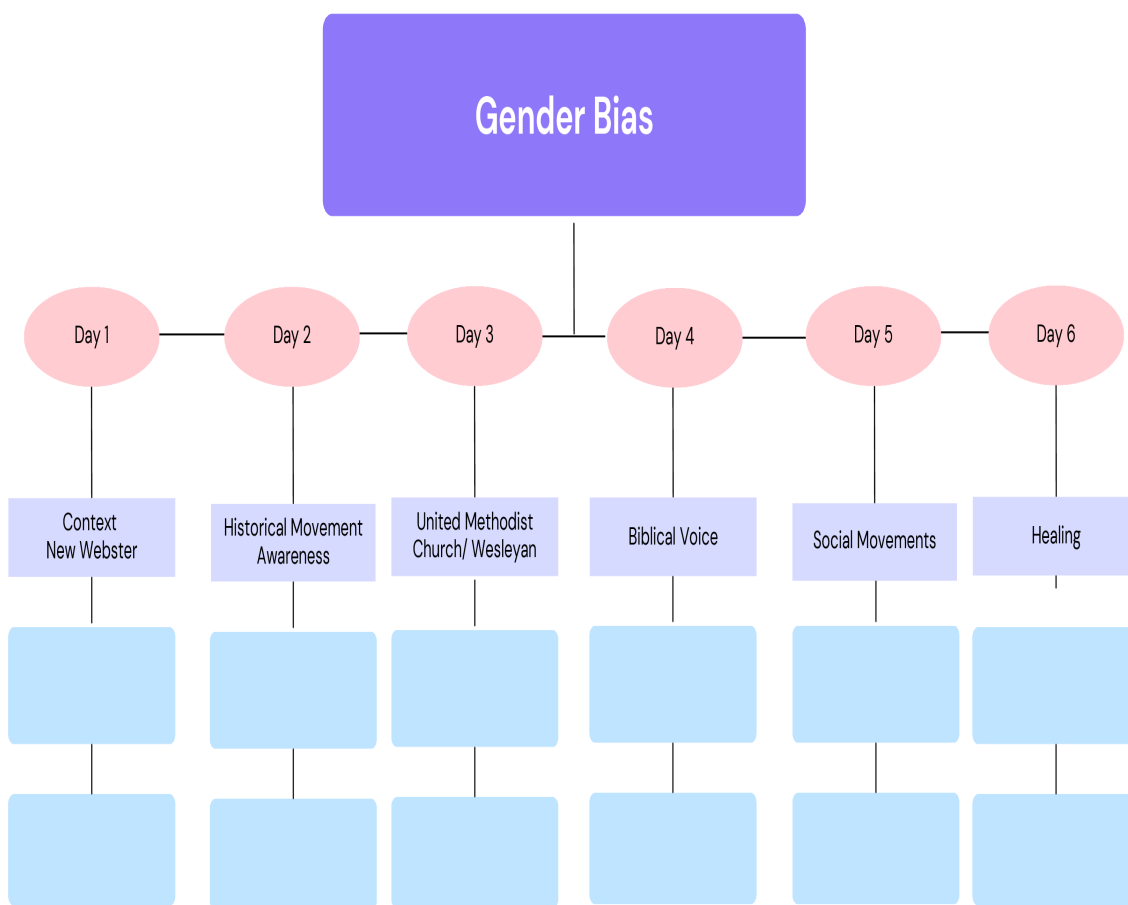
APPENDIX G
CONCEPT MAP

CONCEPT MAP

Participant _____



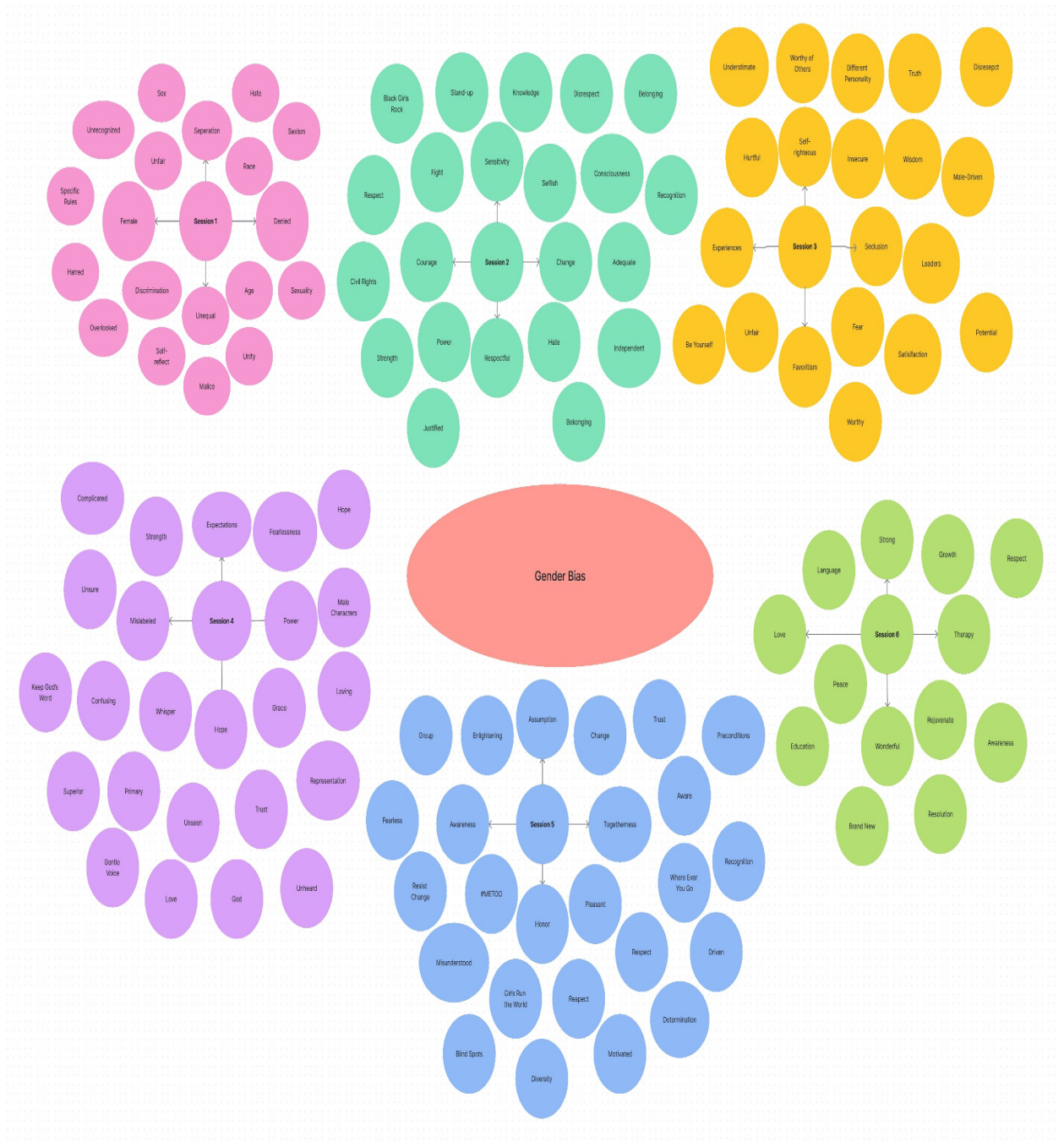
Instructions: Each day add two words in the spaces provided below.



APPENDIX H

VISUAL OF PROJECT CONCEPT MAP

VISUAL OF PROJECT CONCEPT MAP

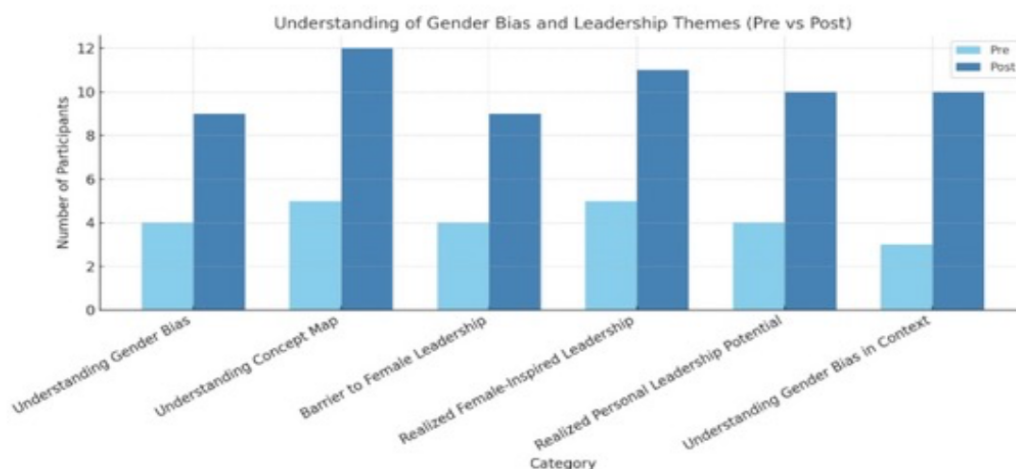


APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRES' BAR GRAPH

Questionnaires' Bar Graph

Illustration of a bar graph displaying participants' **PRE (Light color bar) - and POST- (Darker color bar) understanding** across various categories related to gender bias and leadership. The graph is a visible indication that underscores the need for Gender Bias training in both religious and secular settings. Each darker color bar indicates understanding of Survey questions which indicates that the Sister 2 Sister Connection Workshop is highly successful in achieving its goal of an increased awareness of gender bias and an increase willingness to engage in advocacy.



APPENDIX J

SISTER 2 SISTER SUMMARY CHART

Sister 2 Sister Summary Chart

	Understanding Of Gender Bias		Understanding Of Concept Map		understanding significant barrier to female leadership		Realized Female inspired leadership		Realized personal leadership potential		Understanding of Gender Bias in present context	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
1		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes		
2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes
3		Yes		Yes		Yes		Yes				Yes
4		Yes						Yes		Yes		Yes
5	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes
6				Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes
7		Yes		Yes			Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes
8		Yes										Yes
9	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
10		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes
11		Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes				Yes
12	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes		Yes
13	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes	Yes

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